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# Challenging Space through Activism: Scaling Local and Global Issues at the 2012 London Olympic Games

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University of San Francisco

# Challenging Space through Activism: Scaling Local and Global Issues at the 2012 London Olympic Games

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A Thesis Presented to  
The Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences  
Masters Program in International Studies

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in International Studies

by  
Bridget Botelho  
December 2012



# Challenging Space through Activism: Scaling Local and Global Issues at the 2012 London Olympic Games

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

in

INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

by

Bridget Botelho

December 2012

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

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## Abstract

This qualitative study focuses on issues of space created by the Olympic Games in London and the ways in which activists demonstrated against these issues by using space to their advantage. The Olympic Games is a phenomenon that scales local, national and international space in various ways, through its effects on global culture, identity, and economic processes. The games have a history of protest and activism, but the issues created by the games and struggles against them are not often discussed. My study aims to analyze the spatial effects of the Olympics on a local and global level through the stories of activism.

I discuss the ways in which the Olympic games affects space for a host city, through influencing local politics to unleash spatial practices that favor private development over public necessity. To counter spatial issues including eviction, the seizure of green space, and limitations to access of space, activists in turn use spatial politics to demonstrate against Olympic development. The Olympic Games as a global institution also effects larger spatial practices, such as their corporate sponsorship program, which activists also used spatial tactics to demonstrate against these processes.

I use geographic theory of space and sociological theory of Olympic processes to present a comprehensive analysis of the challenges that activists at the 2012 Olympic games were faced with. Data includes observations of demonstrations leading up to the opening ceremonies of the Olympic games and interview material from counter-Olympic activists. Through my analysis of the ways in which space creates problems and opportunities for activism, and the unique situation the Olympic Games present for spatial politics, I aim to provide examples of strengthened activism against spatial issues.

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## List of Acronyms

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BMA: The Bhopal Medical Appeal

CON: Counter-Olympic Network

CARP: Carpenters Against the Reinstatement Plan

IAAF: International Association of Athletics Federations (Track and Field IF)

ICJB: International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal

IF: International Sports Federations

IOC: International Olympic Committee

LMN: London Mining Network

LOCOG: London Organizing Committee of the Olympic Games

LVRPA: Lee Valley Regional Park Authority

NOC: National Olympic Committee

ODA: Olympic Delivery Authority

OCOG: Organizing Committee of the Olympic Games

TOP: The Olympic Partners Program

UKTSN: UK Tar Sands Network

## Chapter I: Introduction

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As a large congregation started to form at Mile End Park, I was pleasantly surprised to see many familiar faces. Some groups were well connected with one another, but for the most part the large collective did not know one another on a personal basis. Yet they all assembled at the park with one distinct goal—to protest against the political, economic and cultural impact of the Olympic Games. On July 28, 2012, the day following the London 2012 Olympic Games’ opening ceremony, several hundred activists mobilized in a joint effort to supplement what many groups had been doing for several years leading up to this date. Upon the city of London receiving the bid to host the 2012 Summer Games, new groups formulated while previously existing groups launched Olympic-specific campaigns to highlight the impact that the Olympic Games would have on the city.

As of 11AM on June 28, hundreds of people began to congregate along the lawn of Mile End Park in preparation for the march to begin an hour later. A visual role call was held through the giant banners advocating for various causes. Several men unrolled their banner supporting nuclear disarmament while standing next to those holding picket signs for peace in Palestine, who were speaking with members of various London trade workers’ unions. A group of activists from all over the world had met in London to protest the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, Russia. They were dressed in the traditional clothing of the indigenous Circassian population, an ethnic group that was the victim of genocide near Sochi nearly 150 years ago. Many people were walking around with fliers and petitions for various causes, passionately educating fellow activists about

the particular battle that they have been fighting. An array of journalists and media crews arrived to cover the march and the individual groups' stories. The majority of media were from foreign countries, with a very much-noticed lack of presence from major British and American media. Those arriving in the park ranged in age, race and social class, yet were all unified to counter the various ways in which the Olympics affected them all. At Noon, the activists began to line up along Burdett Road. Police vehicles and caution tape lined the block along which the marchers would begin the several mile journey from Mile End Park to Wennington Green. The lineup along the street from Mile End Park appeared to include at least six hundred marchers.

A police vehicle drove along the front of the march to clear a lane on the side of the road throughout the route. The organizers of the counter-Olympic march were careful in planning the route and made sure to have the demonstration approved by London police, the public transit association, and Olympic authorities. Although the route was along a road that was highly visible and attracting local passerby, the approved course was nowhere near Olympic Park and therefore would not disrupt any Olympic events or spectators. I walked from the back to the front of the procession, discussing the turnout of participants with activists—some I had seen countless times through my last five weeks in London and some I had never met before. Everyone was very excited to discuss their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the demonstration, and what this march could potentially mean for the future of the various issues that were represented.

The march halted en route at Bow Quarter, one of the many sites that held surface to air missiles surrounding the Olympic park to aid in the event of a security threat during the games. Activists holding a banner with “Stop the Olympic Missiles—Don't play

games with our lives” in bright red letters stood in front of the building, while a marshal with a megaphone lead chants that were heard by British military standing at the top of the building’s towers. The march proceeded with only a brief second stop near the end destination, caused by an attempt by a policeman to charge a marcher for cutting a section of the plastic tape between the march route and the street. The demonstration reached its conclusion at Wennington Green with a counter-Olympic alternative celebration. Members of Occupy London helped organize a stage and microphone for activists to give speeches and performances. Zita, Co-Founder of Black Activists Rising Against Cuts (BARAC) recited a poem she wrote, titled “Olympic Shame.” Members of the Reclaim Shakespeare Company performed a short piece that ridiculed Olympic sponsor British Petroleum (BP) for sponsoring arts programs in London. Several activists had the chance to speak and many additional groups were scheduled to have their say. But the event was cut short in fear of police intervention. City approval for the event was given until 6pm, and the protest organizers were afraid of pushing the limit. With a police vehicle parked outside of the park and Police Community Supporters inching closer around the park entrance, the activists quickly gathered their things and did not take any chances.

### History and Background

For over a century, the Olympics games have served as a symbol of peace, goodwill and international cooperation through this festival of sport. The games are celebrated throughout the world as athletes train to compete, tourists flock to Olympic cities, and millions of television viewers watch from home every two years. There are

205 official National Olympic Committees (NOCs) to date, representing more countries and territories than those recognized by the United Nations (Miller 2008: 552-553).

Hosting an Olympic games is highly regarded as an honor to any city and nation that is chosen. Countries apply during each application period to have one of their cities host a winter or summer games, spending years and millions of dollars to vie for the Olympic bid before construction on a single venue even begins.

But the Olympic Games are by no means free of political implications. The games have a long history of turmoil, violence, boycott and protest. Although it may not be realized, the Olympic Games have played a role in international politics, for better or for worse. A prime example is the support of Nazi Germany during the Berlin games of 1936. The Olympics have been witness to the civil rights tensions during the 1968 games in Mexico City, the hostage of Israeli athletes by Germans at the 1972 Munich games, and U.S.-Soviet boycotts of the 1980 and 1984 games during the Cold War (Senn 1999). When looking at these events amongst other political standoffs that occur at nearly every winter and summer Olympiad, it becomes apparent that the Olympic Games may not always foster the international goodwill and camaraderie that is claimed.

The political and social dynamics of the Olympic Games reached a new level during the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles. These games marked a new period in Olympic history, with the introduction of corporate sponsorship for International Sports Federations (IFs) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) (Miller 2008). The introduction of The Olympic Partners Programme (TOP) started a trend of big money to athletes and Olympic development organizations that has progressed into an immense corporatization of the games and its institutions. For several decades, the Olympic

sponsor list has included some of the world's biggest corporations including Coca Cola, McDonalds, General Electric, Visa, and others that will be discussed later in further detail. The sponsorship of the Olympic Games and the billions of dollars in revenue that are procured each Olympiad raises the question of when international sport and goodwill are compromised at the expense of money and corporate interest. Activist groups raise these questions that challenge Olympic politics and corporatization in the public sphere at each Olympic Games.

### Statement of the Problem

As previously mentioned, the Olympic Games have historically been filled with political protest from athletes and participating nations. But activism from spectators, usually citizens of Olympic host cities or those who visit to assist in protest, is a fairly recent trend. Protests that challenge Olympic institutions are rarely visible to spectators, with mass media airing coverage that promotes the games. The 2010 Winter Games in Vancouver marked a critical advance in activist mobilization and visibility, although mass media mostly framed the protests in a negative manner. But the gradual breakthroughs of activist groups and networks continued on to the 2012 Summer Olympics in London, where activists were eager to keep the new tradition alive.

The collaborative counter-Olympic march was the *Pièce de résistance* of battles that London activists had been fighting since the city received the bid in 2005. Throughout the seven years leading up to the games, activist groups formed, mobilized and networked with one another to tackle crucial issues in a city that is already historically known for activism and protest. Two levels of activism were created that

tackled two levels of issues created by the Olympic Games. On a local level, London government unleashed aggressive development measures to prepare for the Olympic Games. This led to critical problems for local citizens, including eviction, the seizure of public land, and strict policing measures. On a global level, international Olympic authorities and their London-based counterparts amped up the Olympic spectacle by approving additional socially irresponsible corporate sponsors, strict branding laws and regulation, and high military securitization. The London Olympic Games marked the culmination of these issues as activists mobilized to use the event as a platform to challenge the local and global effects of Olympic practices.

With so many issues being raised on the Olympic platform, the lines between what constitutes one activist cause as local or global become blurred. But activist groups at the Olympics are all bound by the fact that they must deal with one critical concept: space. Space is a fairly recent concept that is much discussed throughout the social sciences. From Lefebvre's first claim that "space is not passive" but rather political, many scrambled to uncover what this exactly means and how society interacts with various types of space.

Olympic activists were all challenged by space in one way or another through Olympic processes. For example, many activists were faced with issues created by development practices in the 2012 Olympic host city, while other battles were fought against the malpractices of Olympic corporate sponsors. Although the problems created by Olympic development in London and those created by the global flows of Olympic politics seem to be easily separated, both categories blur and interact with one another through various spatial practices. Activists at the 2012 London Olympic Games formed

tactics to addresses spatial issues, and further challenged the definitions of local and global space. In order to adequately understand the challenges imposed by various spatial practices on activists at the 2012 London Olympic Games, and how activists demonstrated against them, I answer and analyze two research questions:

1. What tactics did activist groups at the 2012 London Olympic Games employ to overcome spatial injustice and how did they engage spatial politics to advocate for their cause?
2. How did activist groups at the 2012 London Olympic Games demonstrate against spatial practices and use different types of space to their advantage?

I aim to answer these questions first by discussing previous thought and literature regarding space, activism and how both topics have played out in the history of the Olympic Games. I discuss the methods of this study, including the conducting of interviews and observations over a six week time period leading up to and during the Olympic Games in London, England. Following the background and methods of the study, I analyze the main issues presented by the London games and the activist groups and tactics that responded to these issues. I conclude with a comparative analysis between the tactics of groups fighting local issues and those countering global issues, and discuss how this serves as an important example for the future of activism that transcends local and global space.

### Significance

The research questions of this study are important in uncovering critical effects that the Olympic Games have on local and global society. As previously mentioned, space plays a crucial role in both local and global social issues. Contemporary social issues transcend spatial boundaries due to global processes such as globalization, private development and corporatization. In order to tackle important social issues that are now not indicative of a specific space or location, it is important that social activism adapt to transcend geographical and metaphorical spatial boundaries. Through analyzing the tactics used by activists to counter various issues at the Olympic Games, we can understand not only the challenges that contemporary activists are faced with, but also the ways they mobilize and engage to have an impact fit to stand against local and global spatial processes. Furthermore, I analyze the relation between space and social activism as a result of one of the world's most beloved cultural institutions, the Olympic Games. Little research has been done on the true impact of the social, political and economic effects of Olympic processes, including development in Olympic host cities, the several billion dollar industry that backs Olympic federations and committees, and the politics throughout the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and its supporting organizations. But most importantly, even less has been uncovered about the activists that challenge spatial boundaries and politics by using the Olympic Games as a political platform. Typical coverage of Olympic activism frames demonstrators as misinformed, irrational and an obstacle to public enjoyment of the Olympic celebration. But just as space must be reconsidered and redefined, so must activism. Therefore, it is important to understand how activists are using spatial practices to their advantage, as well as the potential to use these tactics to increase impact.

## Chapter II: Space and the Olympic Influence

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To fully analyze the spatial issues created by the London 2012 Olympic Games and the tactics mobilized by social activists, various realms of literature must be considered. My literature discussion begins with geographic theories of space, with a focus on theory that has transformed the way we think about space and the ways in which space is utilized. I discuss critical writings regarding theory that defines local and global space, and the cases in which both intersect. I then analyze two groups of literature that accompany the two main themes of London 2012 activism: spatial theory that pertains to space in terms of locality, and theory that applies to space in a more globalized, metaphorical sense. I discuss theory that defines local and urban space through the ways in which London was affected as an Olympic host city, and the theories that explain the ways in which activists used space to their advantage. Finally, I discuss the spatial processes created by the Olympics as a global institution and how these larger concepts of space also help activists leverage their campaigns. By revealing the challenges of space imposed on activists at the London games and how they, in turn, use space as part of activist tactics, we can begin to understand the unique opportunity created by the Olympics to demonstrate against local and global issues.

### Defining Local and Global Space

Contemporary geographers and social scientists have dedicated much of their recent research to discussing space, what they claim is a primarily postmodern concept. Much of recent literature from various disciplines has aimed to define exactly what “space” is, the structures that define and regulate space, and how society interacts within

them. Henri Lefebvre is an influential thought leader on the subject, as he was one of the first to explore how politics, human agency and social processes shape space. His continued work on various types of space have become much used in contemporary analysis, including his work regarding cities and urban space, which I discuss later. David Harvey also contributes much to the discussion, especially through his theory of time-space compression as a result of global flows and processes.

Early thoughts regarding space bring us to contemporary theory, which further discusses the numerous ways in which space can be defined and manipulated. David Harvey continues to produce new ways to think about spatial boundaries, or lack thereof. In *From space to place and back again: Reflections on the condition of postmodernity*, Harvey analyzes the relationships between space and place, and how place-bound identities are changing as spatial boundaries morph and diminish. He explains that regardless of whether a particular space has physical or metaphorical connotations, space is socially constructed through social practices. Because space can be defined through social processes, he calls for a better way to look at spatial construction, or “some kind of resistance to or rejection of that simple capitalist (or modernist) logic” (Harvey 1993: 12).

Ashraf Ghani responds to Harvey, highlighting the need for space to be seen as “an arena of represented practices.” Space is often thought of in terms of boundaries—whether geographical or metaphorical. Ghani explains that space should be thought of as “a constitutive arena of socio-cultural practices and as a site constituted in the process of contestation over the reproduction of such practices” (Ghani 1993: 51) He takes Harvey’s ideas a bit further, not only calling for a progressive sense of place, but emphasizing the struggle between development practices and those fighting these practices. Ghani

theorizes that it is through understanding the relationships between social processes, and the events and people that contest such practices, that we can understand uneven development within space.

Doreen Massey calls what Harvey refers to as a “progressive sense of place,” since place is no longer static, but rather fluid processes. (Massey 1993: 66). Massey suggests, “Instead then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings” (Massey 1993: 66). Thinking of space as processes rather than static entities can tell us much more about the relationships between local and global space. Massey uses the concept of the “inner city” as an example. She explains that as the economic, social and political realities of the inner city cannot be understood without placing this region in larger context, then “perhaps it is appropriate to think how that kind of understanding could be extended to the notion of a sense of place” (Massey 1993: 66). A complete understanding of an area’s sense of place cannot be achieved without understanding its connection to larger processes and geographical context. Massey prescribes a progressive sense of place, stating that it “would recognize that, without being threatened by it: it would be precisely about the *relationship* between place and space. What we need, it seems to be, is a global sense of the local, a global sense of place” (Massey 1993: 68).

Neil Smith’s concept of scale bending can help provide the context that Massey is looking for. Scale bending analyzes various scales of space including urban, regional, national and global scales, and how these scales are socially produced based on socio-economic practices. Smith not only helps come to terms with the illusory nature of place

that Harvey, Ghani and Massey all touch upon, but he also alludes to something that is critical in analyzing the various struggles of London 2012 activists--scaling both the local and global. He uses the history of struggle against global processes such as colonization as an example. Smith states:

The opposition to contemporary global power emerges out of a number of nationally as well as internationally based struggles: anti-imperialism and anti-war movements obviously, and post-colonial struggles, but also environmental and feminist movements that may have local inspiration but global potential (Smith 1993: 112)

By understanding that space is not static and not always geographical, but rather constructed through social practices across scale, it becomes clear that the struggles over these processes also transcend scale. Therefore, it is important to analyze both the local and global nature of spatial practices in-depth.

### Local Spatial Practices and Issues

London as the host city for the 2012 Olympic games created spatial processes that affect local citizens in many ways. It is first important to consider the space of London, a highly developed urban city that already had plenty of development for local residents to fight against. Henri Lefebvre dedicated much of his later writing on space in urban areas. His concept of the right to city highlights that urban planning and development should support the needs of the local community. He explains that “the right to the city manifests itself as a superior form of rights: right to freedom, to individualization in socialization, to habitat and to inhabit...to participation and appropriation” (Lefebvre 1996: 173-174). In the outer East End of London, local residents do not have the right to

the city. Throughout the past few decades, the local councils have abandoned the needs of its residents in favor of private capital.

David Harvey mentions an important trend in the development of urban areas: the creation of a cultural center (Harvey 1993: 8). Various spaces, no matter how boundaries are drawn, are in competition with other spaces for capital. The cultural center is a type of development used typically in urban areas that aims to attract outside consumers with cultural and symbolic capital, creating what Harvey describes as “the selling of place as part and parcel of an ever-deepening commodity culture” (Harvey 1993: 8). The cultural center is often created without the consent of the region’s local residents, creating a struggle between the façade created by private developers and the genuine community that is expressed from local residents.

The concept of the cultural center helps provide context for the political implications of an Olympic host city. A host city must undergo drastic development to create a cultural center fit to host one of the world’s most beloved mega-events. *Olympic Dreams: The Impact of Mega-Events on Local Politics* provides a public policy-focused approach on the impact the Olympic Games can have on its host cities. Burbank et al. apply Clarence Stone’s regime theory to the Olympic model. Essentially, the regime theory suggests that business and government both have interest, whether aligning or conflicting, in public policy of a locality. The regime theory is perfect in explaining the political dynamics of an Olympic host city (Burbank et al. 2001). The Olympic Games is now a full-blown conglomerate that is backed by big money and ulterior motives—a reality which will be discussed later.

Olympic institutions impose its interests of private enterprise on host cities, which vie for an Olympic bid based on promises of increased tourism, profit and global fame. In fact, many social scientists include the Olympic Games in the concept of a global spectacle. Therefore, Harvey's idea of a cultural center is not only produced in a host city, but also amplified and accelerated. The Olympics are the perfect example of a global spectacle, as it requires its own set of expectations for host cities, regardless of this city's level of development and accommodations for the event. The expectations imposed on local government of an Olympic host city allow for drastic spatial processes to unleash in preparation of their respective Olympic Games. An issue of most importance is the recent lack of foresight amongst local government in their planning for the games—a “megaproject spectacle” (Coaffee and Johnston 2007: 142). Jon Coaffee discusses how urban policy for regeneration and renewal has become important for host cities, as the Olympic Games have a huge impact on urban development. But planning policy can have both positive and negative impacts. Coaffee uses the 1992 Summer Games in Barcelona as a prime example planning that can rejuvenate a local economy through both public and private investment. But most host cities are not as fortunate as Barcelona, as the policy to prepare for this international event is ultimately subject to the ulterior motives of the host city's local government.

As one of the world's most famous global cities, London is already subject to the creation of cultural centers and related development tasks, long before Olympic development began. In fact, one of the most referenced examples of spatial practices that infringe on local communities is that of the London Docklands. Jon Bird's *Dystopia on the Thames* illustrates the redevelopment of the Docklands and the consequences created

through privatization. The 1970s marked an important time for London, as political parties struggled to lay “claim to the city” by proposing urban planning that contributed to each party’s subjective view of London’s identity. Whereas Social and Democratic Party councils “challenged the dominant meanings of city spaces and activities,” they were “only to be abolished by Conservative government legislation replacing the social infrastructure and privatized services and facilities” (Bird 1993: 121). London residents fought back through events such as the Brixton riots of 1981 and numerous workers’ strikes.

The Thatcher government succeeded in developing arguably the most explicit example of private development along Docklands and the Canary Wharf on London’s Isle of Dogs. Bird explains that the Docklands “represents the single largest building project ever undertaken—a \$7bn investment into 12 million square feet of office space, apartments, restaurants, shopping malls and riverside facilities, which includes the country’s (and until recently, Europe’s) highest single building at over 800 feet” (Bird 1993: 121). The London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC), a product of the Thatcher government, took charge of redeveloping the Docklands, which spanned throughout the boroughs of Newham, Southwark and Tower Hamlets. Redevelopment was put in the hands of the LDDC consortia and the Toronto-based property development firm Olympia and York, and out of the hands of the democratically elected local councils. The new development of the Docklands allowed private firms to operate sans “local authority investigation or sanction” (Bird 1993: 122). The takeover of the Docklands by private developers put the old and new narratives of this area head-to-head. Private developers framed the old Docklands as an “urban wasteland”, desperately in need of

regeneration that would benefit local residents and bring new business and investment into the area.

Graeme Evans' case study of the development of London after receiving the bid for the 2012 summer games analyzes the proposed outcomes of the spatial tactics unleashed as of 2007. His account of the transformation of London's outer East End already show signs of the push for spatial practices that highlight spectacle and the creation of an ultra-Olympic cultural center. But the local councils of the boroughs of Olympic Park, and the London Organizing Committee of the Olympic Games (LOCOG), publicize what Evans calls the "urban three R's" of regeneration, renaissance and renewal, in order to justify planning and policy changes to local residents (Evans 2007: 298). A big concept for the analysis of the issues imposed on London activists is that of regeneration. Evans uses a definition from one of his previous works, which states that regeneration is "the renewal, revival, revitalization or transformation of a place or community" (Evans 2007: 298). The problem with regeneration is that this concept is typically used as a scapegoat for the creation of spectacle, justifying spatial practices that create social problems, those which I now discuss.

### Spatial Practices and Creating "Otherness"

Spatial processes such as private development and the creation of cultural centers can create various types of inclusion for some groups and most importantly, exclusion for others. Doreen Massey's *Power-geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place* further explains the relationship between differing viewpoints on the meaning of space. Massey aligns with Harvey and others who theorize that space is now constructed by processes of

capitalism (Massey 1993: 60). Massey elaborates on this idea, discussing how flows of capital create relationships of power, or a power-geometry, in which some are in control of these processes and others are forced to bear the results and in most cases, the consequences of such processes (Massey 1993: 61). Most importantly, the power relationships created by the flows of capital create a “politics of mobility and access,” which creates space that caters to some groups while excluding and even oppressing other groups. Harvey also contributes to the discussion of exclusion through his idea that because geographical lines are blurred, more emphasis is put on metaphorical and psychological meanings of space that inherently define space by means of exclusion, creating spatial barriers based on ‘otherness’ and ‘difference’ (Harvey 1993: 4).

Private property development in the Docklands created an “otherness” similar to what Massey and Harvey describe. Yet the Docklands can also shed light on an important result of exclusion, the mobilization of activism. Neil Smith even discusses the potential for activism. He agrees that spatial processes can lead to exclusion, but also believes in what he calls a “double-edged” nature of scale. He believes that while spatial boundaries may exclude groups, space restrictions also have the power to “become a weapon of expansion and inclusion, a means of emerging identities” (Smith 1993: 114).

### Spatial Exclusion as a Tool for Mobilization

The Docklands provides another perfect example of how locals mobilized across place and identity to form an activist community. Peter Dunn and Loraine Leeson’s *The Art of Change in Docklands* discusses activist methods in this area of London and its importance to the discourse and politics of regenerating space. In 1981, Dunn and

Leeson worked with activist groups of the Docklands to help increase visibility of local culture and unify the “distinct micro-cultures” of Docklands into one cohesive campaign. The action groups of Docklands were of wide variety throughout an expansive network, including various umbrella organizations and coalitions (Dunn and Leeson 1993: 139). They joined the network of activists to help for the Docklands Community Poster project, which worked under an umbrella coalition, the People’s Plan for the Royal Docks. Organizing this activist community was “a dynamic process which began with the majority of people in Docklands confused and on the defensive, to that of a substantial and cohesive community” (Dunn and Leeson 1993: 139).

Massey points out that place can have multiple identities, and mentions the London Docklands as an example of the struggle between the region’s past heritage, current reality, and future development. Harvey also touches upon the loyalty that local residents can feel toward a particular space. He states, “Loyalty to place can and does have political meaning, even under circumstances where the daily practices of people in that place show little commonality” (Harvey 1993: 23).

Activism via community building in Docklands leads to successful demonstrations that challenge the boundaries between public and private space. For example, between 1984 and 1986, The Docklands Community Poster Project helped to organize the People’s Armada, in which flotillas of boats sailed the Thames to the Houses of Parliament, occupying the river and attracting a generous amount of media coverage” (Dunn and Leeson 1993: 129).

Docklands activists put pressure on the LDDC to comprise a Community Development Unit and stopped development on various building projects (Dunn and

Leeson 1993: 127). Most importantly, Docklands activists challenged the dominant discourse around the very area in which they lived, providing an alternative way of thinking about regeneration. Whereas the LDDC was once revered in the media, outlets began to refer to the “controversial Development Corporation”. Many activist organizations were able to receive assistance from the Greater London Council, giving them a chance against development corporations and their public relations support. In this sense, activists prevailed in reclaiming their part of the city.

### Redefining Community as Spatial Scale

An important concept regarding the politics of space is the definition of community. With private development and other institutions setting boundaries on geographical space, a sense of community can be interpreted in various ways. Harvey even predicted that resistance to politics of space could be created by forming “imagined and tangible communities” (Harvey 1993: 27). The creation of community can have a huge impact on the success of repossessing and bringing meaning back to a space. Neil Smith’s *Homeless/Global: Scaling Places* deals with the various meanings of community and which definition is most fitting for current society. Through his description of The Homeless Vehicle, a mobile resource for the homeless of New York City, Smith draws some keen insights on how current spatial processes redefine community.

Because spatial practices now transcend across many boundaries—geographical and/or metaphorical—defining community becomes ever more elusive. Smith explains this difficulty, stating that “community is therefore the least specifically defined of spatial scales, and the consequent vague yet generally affirmative nurturing meaning attached to

‘community’ makes it one of the most ideologically appropriated metaphors in contemporary public discourse” (Smith 1993: 105).

Community is often redefined when a struggle within or across space occurs. Smith uses the example of the British black community. In the early 80s, social injustice via unemployment, high policing and racism affected blacks and Asians living in Britain, mobilizing citizens identifying with either racial group to mobilize in solidarity, defining a unified ‘black’ community that still persists in British political discourse. This illustrates the idea that “place-based struggles can...galvanize a more progressive response as previously fragmented social groups coalesce into a politically defined community” (Smith 1993: 106). Dunn and Lesson discussed the great effects of community building in the Docklands, and redefined it to better fit the realities of community mobilization:

Community... is an identifiable ‘sphere of discourse’ with codes of inclusion - a micro-culture—which is, of necessity, meshed with other spheres of culture and society, and engaged actively with them in a continual dynamic of change (Dunn and Leeson 1993: 142)

Through analyzing the various ways to define community and the power of community building in fighting exclusion and spatial politics we can understand that community building has the potential to transcend the local and mobilize activist groups across space and issues.

### The Role of the Olympics in Global Spatial Processes

In addition to spatial concepts regarding the local impact on the Olympic host city, we must also look at the impact the Olympic Games has in shaping global spatiality. The issues that London 2012 activists demonstrated against transcend local scale by using

the Olympics as a global platform to highlight their issues. The Olympic Games have contributed to global culture and in this sense, globalization. Maurice Roche's *Mega Events and Modernity: Olympics and Expos in the Growth of Global Culture* discusses how the Olympics contribute to culture, citizenship, and community at both local and global scales (Roche 2000: 1). The Olympic Games practice on the global scale, in the sense that the main is to foster international goodwill through sport. The Olympic charter itself is founded on 'Olympism', an ideology that "appears to seek to elevate sport into the leading edge of a broader idealistic and universalistic humanitarian mission in the modern world" (Roche 200: 194). However, idealistic Olympism has failed to account for global economic, political and social realities over a century of its existence. Furthermore, in the past three decades "these gaps have widened as the Olympic Games event have become massively mediatized and commercialized" (Roche 2000: 197).

Roche analyzes how the Olympics have contributed to global cultural practices, and consequently defines various types of global citizenship that help explain the global processes and communities created by the Olympics and similar world 'mega-events.' The most relevant dimension of global citizenship in this context is that of "Universal Citizenship," which Roche defines as a type of citizenship emphasizing "the common status of human being, and the possession, thereby, of these common [human] rights" (Roche 2000: 200). The Olympics hold universal citizenship as ideal, as Roche argues that such international events even institutionalize this ideal (Roche 2000: 200). The Olympics as an institution must be recognized as a solicitor of universal citizenship and therefore must be held accountable for upholding this ideal. Roche states:

Mega-event movements are thus, in principle normatively assessable and accountable in terms of the degree to which they promote, or undermine, the

maximal distribution and exercise of human rights and thus the ideal ‘universal citizenship’ they imply. (Roche 2000: 200)

Olympic institutions have failed to uphold the ideal of universal citizenship, as they have countless failed to regulate human rights abuses throughout the history of the games. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) and other Olympic institutions have supported fascism in the 1936 Berlin games, proceeded with the games after the Tlatelolco massacre just ten days before the 1968 Mexico City games, and fell witness to the rise of the Soviets in Moscow (1980) just to provide a few examples (Roche 2000: 203). Roche’s analysis helps explain how the Olympics promote global citizenship, yet create further problems through its failure to regulate Olympic global processes.

I previously discuss the idea of place and spatial processes that may focus on a locality but also hold importance in a global context. Roche claims that the same can be said vice versa. By redefining global citizenship and global cultural identities, the Olympics facilitate time-space compression, a term coined by David Harvey. Through an international event supported by many international organizations and institutions, the Olympic Games “carry significant implications for people’s lived understandings of embodiment, space, time and agency (Roche 2000: 22). The global culture created by mega-events, especially sport culture, now affects the structure of global space (Roche 2000: 22). The Olympic global sense of place interacts with local space through the construction of the Olympic host city, “identifying them as having the power to transform themselves from being mundane places...into being these special ‘host city’ sites” (Roche 2000:224). Therefore, the Olympics create a situation in which locality is promoted through a global context, forming a dialectical relationship between the local and global, making each definition of space impossible to understand without explaining

its connection to the other.

Thus far I have considered pertinent literature regarding theories of space, definitions of community and identity within and throughout various types of space, and how the Olympic Games encompass and contribute to these definitions and practices. By discussing the various dimensions of space and spatial scale, I have laid the intricate groundwork that London 2012 activists had to navigate. As the realities of the Olympic Games become more apparent, activists mobilize to counter the spatial processes of Olympic development, culture and rhetoric. The struggles against spatial practices such as redevelopment and privatization that have been fought in localities are now being brought to the world stage. We are on the brink of a new trend in which Olympic practices are challenged by Olympic social activism. Therefore, it is important to consider the recent ways that social activists have used the Olympic Games to span local and global issues. An important Olympics for activism was the 2010 Winter Games in Vancouver, Canada. The success of Vancouver activists set a precedent that London 2012 activists aspired to live up to. In *Space Matters: The 2010 Winter Olympics and its Discontents*, Jules Boykoff describes the atrocities created by Olympic development, and how Vancouver activists rallied to fight the Olympic machine.

Space was an issue for Vancouver activists, and in fact a main focus of activist mobilization and strategy. He references Lefebvre's idea of spatial contradictions, or "conflicts between socio-political interests and forces" that occur within a space and are therefore contradictory (Boykoff 2011: 5). Contradictions of space were seen in Vancouver through the "lack of access" to the Olympic park and venues. This was created through high securitization, which even limited Olympic spectator actions, such

as taking photographs of Olympic events. The limitations created by Olympic development led to a struggle for space between the Canadian state and those exercising dissent against the Olympics. A situation was created in which the state was trying to control space, while activists were relentless in using spatial tactics to exercise their right to protest and reclaim the right to public space throughout Vancouver (Boykoff 2011: 6). Boykoff refers to Mustafa Dikeç's concepts: the spatiality of injustice and the injustice of spatiality. The spatiality of injustice refers to physical and metaphorical spaces that perpetuate societal injustice, whereas the injustice of spatiality refers to the limitations for political dialogue within constructed space. (Boykoff 2011: 6)

Neil Smith's concept of "scale bending" also holds importance for Vancouver activism, as anti-Olympic activists highlighted their struggle against local, national and international scales (Boykoff 2011: 7). Scale bending was also demonstrated through transnational activist networks from past and future Olympic host cities. For example, Salt Lake City activists shared insights to Vancouver activists, London 2012 and Sochi 2014 activists traveled to Vancouver to get a head start on activism, followed by Vancouver activists visiting London to help strengthen its activism (Boykoff 2011: 8).

Boykoff touches upon "discursive space," through the discussion of Vancouver activists' strategy to challenge mass media and communicate their message. Like in most cases, mass media was difficult to enlist as a tool for activism. Boykoff also mentions the lack of attention to activism via U.S. media, the various cycles of coverage in Canadian media, and the IOC media center's attempts to cover up coverage of dissent and activism (Boykoff 2011: 8). The creation of the Vancouver Media Co-op served as a way of circumventing the limitations of mainstream media and therefore the mainstream political

agenda. Boykoff's analysis reveals that the true struggle of Vancouver 2010 was between the state and Olympic regulation of space and the activists' aims to reclaim it. The tactics of activists transcended the local and global via scale bending and illustrated how activists use the locality of 'the city' as a platform to advocate for larger issues.

Therefore, there seems to be a trend created by the Olympics effects on both local and global space, and how activists are choosing to demonstrate against such spatial processes.

Combining spatial theory and Olympic-focused literature provides an opportunity to consider the impact that this mega-event has on society. Geography theorists explain that there are many ways to define space and scale, and that these definitions remain fluid and transcendent. Past activist tactics, especially at the 2012 Vancouver Games, demonstrate how activists are learning to utilize space and create new definitions of scale that allow them to build impact for local and global issues.

### Chapter III: Methodology

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My study at the 2012 London Olympic Games aims to gain a better understanding of the various activists groups using the games as a platform, the challenges imposed on these groups due to spatial processes and restrictions, and how activist groups demonstrated against these issues. The Olympic Games have a history of protest and activism that are often hidden from the general public. In preparation, Olympic host cities undergo drastic changes that put spatial restrictions on local residents. The Olympic Games also serve as a medium for international activist causes, as it is one of the most-watched international events. Yet the Olympics can be a catalyst for local and/or global spatial injustice. Therefore, it is important to look more closely at the activist networks and tactics at the Olympic Games in an effort to understand the potential to mobilize activists against the most critical social issues.

The research questions of this study are as follows:

1. What tactics did activist groups at the 2012 London Olympic Games employ to overcome spatial injustice and how did they engage spatial politics to advocate for their cause?
2. How did activist groups at the 2012 London Olympic Games demonstrate against spatial practices and use different types of space to their advantage?

This qualitative study was designed to gain insight into the activist groups at the Olympic Games and their various networks. Interviews and observations were recorded to gain a comprehensive view of activism at the Olympic Games. Interviews focused on

how spatial restrictions affect activism, how activists groups overcame these limitations, and also how groups felt connected or disconnected from the larger network of Olympic activists. Observations were also taken via participatory observation at protests and demonstrations. The data were transcribed and organized based on major themes related to the research questions.

### Setting

My research was conducted in London, England, aside from preliminary online correspondence with participant activists. London is known to be an international mega city that serves as a leader in culture, politics and the world economy. Leading up to the Olympic Games, most of the demonstrations I participated in and observed were in the outer east London boroughs of Hackney, Newham, Waltham Forest and Tower Hamlets—boroughs that are generally low income with substantial minority populations. The land surrounding Olympic Park has been neglected by local government, providing a stark contrast between the old parts of the outer East End where locals reside, and the privately developed Olympic Park. A few demonstrations were located in Trafalgar Square, a predominant public space in central London. Most of my interviews were also conducted in outer east London, as most of my research subjects resided in the areas that were most affected by Olympic development.

### Sample/Participants

The study consisted of a purposive sample comprised of subjects who were involved in social activism at the 2012 London Olympic Games. The general criteria for

this sample was that the research participant must have been involved in the organization and demonstration of one or more groups that were using the Olympic Games as a medium of protest. Sample participants ranged across age, gender, race and socio-economic status. The majority of activists were white and working-class, although the majority of members in one activist group that was demonstrating against eviction from their homes—Carpenters Against the Regeneration Plan (CARP)—were predominately black. As previously mentioned, the majority of research participants resided in the four main boroughs surrounding Olympic Park—Hackney, Newham, Waltham Forest and Tower Hamlets.

### Measurement Instruments

#### **Interviews**

Members of the sample were asked interview questions regarding their involvement in an activist group or network of groups, and also their personal opinions on activist demonstrations and the effect they had in challenging Olympic and/or spatial politics. Interviews were conducted in person during four weeks leading up to the opening ceremonies and the first week of the Olympic Games. Interview questions were prepared prior to conducting interviews, but were loosely structured to provide opportunities for participants to share what they thought was most important (See Appendix A). Through my interviews and observations, I was able to interact with over 20 activist groups that demonstrated on the Olympic political platform (See Appendix B). I conducted a total of 32 interviews, which consisted mostly of participants who directly partook in activism, and a few journalists and artists who supported various campaigns.

Interviews were conducted either at demonstration sites before during or after demonstrations, or at locations set by interviewees outside of when demonstrations were not in process. Responses to interview questions were recorded through both hand-written notes and tape recordings, to ensure accuracy, and lasted between 20 and 90 minutes.

### **Observations**

Observations were recorded through participatory observation of demonstrations and protests leading up to and during the opening week of the Olympic Games. Events observed included demonstration stunts against corporate sponsorships, events that challenged development of neighborhoods surrounding Olympic venues, and a collaborative march involving all activist groups during the weekend of the Olympic opening ceremonies. Observations were conducted in a natural non-manipulated setting, at locations and events where activist demonstrations were taking place. The researcher was a participant observer who took part in demonstrations and activist-organized events. Interviews and observations were recorded over a period of six weeks that covered five weeks prior to the Olympic opening ceremonies and the first week of the Olympic Games.

### **Data Analysis**

The data were collected, transcribed and organized to coincide with major themes and concepts relating to the two research questions of the study. Data were coded and categorized by themes that could assist in answering the research questions and related

issues, with a focus on organizing content by various ways in which space played a factor in activism. Anecdotes and quotations that highlighted major themes within the data were selected and organized based on the concepts relating to the research questions. An informal media analysis was also conducted, including research of activist group websites, blogs, and social media. Coverage of activist campaigns was also tracked in mainstream and independent media, to gain a sense of how far and amongst what networks the campaigns were communicating their message.

## Chapter IV: Local issues and Activism

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On July 6, 2005, London won the bid to host the 2012 summer Olympic Games. After a long and over £16 million process, the International Olympic committee (IOC) decided that London was the ideal host for the 2012 games, superior to the fellow candidate cities of Paris, Madrid, Moscow and New York. The London committee brought its final presentation to Singapore, which included a diverse group of children from the outer-London neighborhood of Stratford, the future home of Olympic Park. The London bid highlighted inspiring ideals: regenerating a diverse community that has been rundown by economic hardship, inspiring the youth of London, and bringing the games to a robust and diverse urban setting. The Olympic committee granted the city of London a chance to fulfill its dream to leave a legacy that would prevail long after the games were finished.

The reception of the Olympic bid sparked a full-on transformation of outer east London that lasted seven years leading up to the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Development plans that were supposedly aimed at regenerating the outer East End—spanning the typically low-income boroughs of Newham, Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest and Hackney—were put into effect as local government councils surrendered their power to the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA), the London Committee of the Olympic Games (LOCOG) and private development corporations. As previously discussed, this push for regeneration introduced spatial practices that benefit certain groups of people while leaving other groups disadvantaged. In the case of the 2012 Olympic Games, the disadvantaged groups were the local residents the outer East End.

In my discussion of the activist tactics that fought local issues at the 2012 Olympic Games, I explain the main spatial issues that local residents mobilized against: eviction, the seizure of natural public land, and general restrictions to space. Most importantly, I focus on the tactics used by London activists to reclaim the space that they were deprived of and the impact their efforts had during the Olympic Games and beyond.

### Eviction

As previously discussed, private development is not a new phenomenon in London. The development of the Docklands and Canary Wharf, a city region that spans part of the same boroughs as the Olympic park, remains a prime example of the tension between government initiatives and the well being of the local community. The development of the Olympic park became yet another situation in which local government put ideals of profit over local necessity. Therefore, the Olympics created a situation in which private firms and corporations unleashed opportunities for their own economic growth, while “the risk ultimately is underwritten by the state and municipal authorities, with the maximum impacts falling on local communities” (Evans 2007: 304).

One stark consequence of a space consumed by privatization is the eviction of local residents. As previously mentioned, the four boroughs through which the Olympic park resided—Newham, Tower Hamlets, Hackney and Waltham Forest—are low-income areas with a strong majority of racial and ethnic minorities. With Olympic development valuing tourism and international fame, the needs of those living in the area were not of priority. Hence, a new wave of activism materialized to advocate for the needs of local residents.

The first victims of eviction were the 450 residents of Clays Lane Estate, a housing cooperative that was bulldozed over in exchange for the Olympic Stadium. Residents were forced to leave their homes and received minimal relocation assistance. A campaign to fight against eviction was initiated, although the tenants eventually became pessimistic about fighting local councils and the London Development Agency (LDA). The Clays Lane Estate fell victim to Olympic development at an early stage, setting a precedent for what was to come. The residents of the Carpenters Estate were also threatened to leave their home in Stratford. Although the estate still remains, over 400 residents have been evicted as of today, with the threat of additional evictions. But those still living at the Carpenters Estate refuse to give up before justice is served and the culprits of eviction are held accountable.

#### Carpenters Against the Regeneration Plan (CARP)

The residents of the Carpenters Estate of Stratford were a community that fell victim to the development of Olympic Park. The Carpenters Estate is a settlement of housing provided and overseen by the local government, the Newham Council. Council estates originated in efforts to provide affordable housing to low-income citizens (Machin 2006). However, recent trends in private development have put council estates in jeopardy. The Newham council had been making plans to sell off local land to the highest bidder—private corporations and housing developers—and the Olympic Games were the perfect catalyst to what has been, and continues to be, a full-on land grab.

The eviction of residents in the three apartments blocks of the Carpenters Estate started in 2005. The mayor of Newham, Robin Wales, called for an asbestos report as an

excuse to start a decant process—a council-ordered gradual evacuation process—claiming that the apartment blocks were unfit to live in. The process forced over 400 residents out of their homes without a proper plan to relocate those evicted, or the right to return to their homes once they were fit to live in again. The apartment blocks stayed fully intact for several years while many floors remained completely empty despite the council estate having the highest waitlist for tenants in England. Instead of providing much needed housing to low-income citizens, Mayor Wales used several hundred thousand pounds to develop media suites for the BBC to use and lease to other media corporations. In total, 21 flats were reserved for Olympic media suites.

Hence, Carpenters' residents mobilized to form Carpenters Against the Regeneration Plan (CARP), an organization that would help fight and lobby for their rights. They did everything in their power to protect their homes: demonstrations at city council, lobbying with local officials, and educating the public of what was happening to the estate. While many were evicted to prepare for the BBC and fellow leasing media network, Al Jazeera, many residents refused to give up and continued to live at the estate throughout the Olympic Games.

### The Anti-Gentrification Tour

On July 21, 2012, CARP held their second anti-gentrification tour of the estate and surrounding neighborhood in Stratford. These tours were planned in response to Olympic-sponsored tours that were made to attract tourists and show visitors how great the Olympic games was for reviving the outer east boroughs of London. But the Olympic-sponsored tours framed the regeneration of Stratford as a positive effect of the

Olympics that had revitalized a worn down area. The anti-gentrification tour tells the real story behind the Olympic façade.

I arrived at the Stratford tube station at 11:45am on July 21. I exited the tube platform and was lost amongst a sea of signs pointing me in every direction—toward more underground train lines, to the London overground trains, and finally to the exit of the Stratford station. I walked past brightly colored McDonalds' ads of feel good images juxtaposing the fast food chain's employees and Olympic athletes crossing the finish line and standing atop a podium, medals glowing. I was distracted by the ads and finally realized that I was misled away from the old exit of the Stratford station, and instead found myself upon the new exit to London's newest Westfield shopping mall. The shopping center was built specifically for the Olympics games to provide shopping and eating destinations for tourists and visitors to Olympic Park. This did not sound like the exit that was described as the meeting destination for the tour.

Feeling lost, I turned around back into the station, searched for a sign of the correct exit, and found the sliding glass doors to the original exit of Stratford station. Upon exiting I found myself directly in the middle of old and new Stratford. To my left was a grand staircase leading to the Westfield mall that I had found accidentally—a brand new facility with the highest end designer stores and restaurants, catering to tourists and visitors from central London. To my right, the Stratford Centre, a shopping center with low-priced stores, craft and food stands, and locally owned businesses—the town center of local residents. The courtyard between both centers was filled with locals, foreigners, Olympic volunteers, and many metropolitan police. I was suddenly aware that I was

being watched as I became cognizant of how many police security were in the courtyard—some unarmed, but also a significant number of armed officers.

I searched desperately for a sign of the tour's meeting spot, while a volunteer handed me a flag with "The Mayor's Newham Show" written on it. The Mayor's show was a supposed community event for local residents, but also part of the Mayor's real show of appeasing tourists. I saw a small, handwritten sign that said "Carpenters Tour! Here" twenty feet to my right. I walked over and introduced myself to a Carpenters' resident who was our tour guide. We waited for thirty minutes as a group began to congregate, including Carpenters residents, university students, Londoners who were eager to learn more, and a few independent media crews. We began the tour by walking along a footbridge that connects the Stratford station to the Jubilee underground line. For residents, it is the only way to get to the Carpenters Estate from Stratford Centre, as officials have closed off most of the estate from tourism hubs via concrete and brick walls, blocking off transportation and most foot traffic.

We began at the Carpenters Estate where we saw the low-level traditional style homes and the high-rise apartment blocks. Along each entire side of the apartment blocks spanned advertisements for Gillette shaving products, depicting Olympic athletes busting out from the side of the building, as if they were breaking through the walls. The advertisements were plastered on the sides of the apartment blocks without any notice or approval from council residents. We stopped frequently to hear personal stories from estate residents. One resident spoke about how a power generator—installed for the BBC studios—keeps his wife and young children up at night. An elderly resident was nearly brought to tears as she shared the history of her struggle including the countless times she

had been nearly forced to leave her apartment. The tour halted once again in front of the Lund Point apartment block, one of the buildings that the BBC had rented the top floors of for aerial coverage of Olympic Park. The entrance to Lund Point was heavily guarded by London police's community support staff and the BBC's own private security. Our tour guide approached the door of Lund Point and told the private security that him and the rest of the tour group were visiting a friend who lived in the building. Security told him that he would have to call the resident to come outside and welcome everyone. The Carpenters tenant who offered to show us his apartment came outside to greet us and turned around to reenter the building, but was refused entrance by private security. Some members of CARP stayed to fight this injustice as others continued to finish the tour.

We traveled along Stratford High Street, which once held many bustling local businesses, but now only two establishments remain. We met a barber who won the title of "Last Man Standing" by local media, since he literally is one of the only survivors of private development in Stratford. We continued down the high street as we witnessed a leg of the Olympic torch relay. Samsung and Coca Cola parade floats preceded the torchbearer down the street, as spectators filled the sidewalks.

We arrived back at Lund Point where CARP members were still in discussion with the building's security. After ninety minutes had passed, two metropolitan police vans arrived. We stood outside holding banners and placards to protest the injustice. Finally, a policeman escorted the tour group into the apartment building, and let the resident of the building back into his home. We arrived at the 20<sup>th</sup> floor greeted by the BBC's private security personnel, who ran the stairs the whole way to beat the elevators. Once again, he asked that the resident of the apartment escort the tour members to his

apartment. We all squeezed into the man's tiny apartment where we could view the Olympic park and the stark contrast between old and new Stratford.

We left Lund Point and re-congregated at the Carpenters Arms, the resident pub. The metropolitan police had followed the tour to the pub, asking me and fellow tour-goers if we had any plans to jeopardize the Olympic park. After the police conducted a search of the pub, they had finally realized that the residents of the estate were not a threat to their own homes, and left the tour group to socialize at the pub and further discuss the issues that Carpenters' residents are faced with.

### Challenging Dominant Spatial Discourse

CARP's anti-gentrification tour allowed me to see the stark reality created by spatial politics. As previously discussed, spatial practices create an otherness through flows of capital. The development of Olympic Park is a prime example of how the development of space can benefit one group over another. Newham council had previously composed a proposal for private enterprise, marketing Newham as the next "Regeneration Supernova" ("Newham Investment Prospectus"). The proposal failed to attract business and private housing developers. Therefore, the Olympics were the perfect opportunity for Newham council to take a second shot at regeneration.

The Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) and private contractors that were hired to develop the Olympic park created a space that favors tourists, wealthy Londoners, and the future of private capital. For example, while viewing the new entrance to the Stratford station, it is clear that the new Westfield shopping mall is of no use to local residents, and in fact an obstruction to their livelihood. One Carpenters resident very

much understood that the so-called regeneration of Stratford was due to these flows of private capital:

Well it started before the Olympics in actual fact. But I think that with the Olympics...it's like our land is worth money now. And that's what it is to them, it's all about money.

This resident refers to the new deal proposed by the University College London (UCL) to acquire land in Stratford as an example. The university wishes to acquire the estate and surrounding land to build a new research facility in outer east London. UCL's planning proposal highlights the fact that because Stratford is now part of the "Olympic legacy," it has new opportunity for wealth and business growth. Therefore, what was proposed to locals as temporary development has served as a catalyst for permanent, private development.

Furthermore, developers created walls and barriers to transport between the Olympic park and surrounding neighborhoods, literally drawing boundaries between space with the concentration of wealth and capital, and the residual space left with depleted resources. I previously discussed Doreen Massey's idea that spatial processes create "politics of mobility and access" between groups in power and "the other" (Massey 1993: 61). The local government supports spatial practices that place money over public necessity, while publicizing such processes as "regeneration" that is essential to the well being of the local community. The politics of mobility and access are loud and clear in Stratford. The physical and metaphorical walls around the Olympic park not only separate local citizens from those favored by spatial processes, but they also speak to larger political dynamics. Newham just so happens to be one of the poorest boroughs of the greater London area, with the tenants of the Carpenters estate representing both

low-income and racial minority demographics (“Community Forum Profile”). Therefore, the development in preparation for the Olympic Games has created a vehicle for larger spatial politics and stratification.

As mentioned in the case of the Docklands, the case for regeneration has been a dominant discourse fed to the citizens of London over the past few decades. The development of Olympic Park in Stratford is nearly a carbon copy of the planning used to regenerate the Docklands, an area just south of Stratford in outer east London. The Docklands was surrendered by local government to a private development corporation with the intent of making the area attractive for external enterprise. Therefore, the development of the Olympic park became a catalyst for aggressive conservative spatial politics and remains the scapegoat for the ulterior motives of Newham’s mayor, Robin Wales. One CARP member feels that the regeneration of Stratford is “just the mayor’s vision before he goes out of power basically, to make a name for himself. It’s an, ‘Oh, look what I’ve done for Newham’ sort of thing.” A main organizer of CARP is also certain that although the development of Stratford had begun before preparation for the Olympics and will continue to happen:

The mayor has run out of fuel, and the Olympics is the fuel for his car of regeneration, or gentrification. He’s put his foot hard on the pedal. So essentially, the Olympics wouldn’t have made much of a difference in regards to our campaign, it’s just put extra fuel to the fire.

The physical and metaphorical boundaries set between the rich and poor in the Docklands, and now Stratford, are a prime example of how spatial politics cater to some groups at the expense of others. Dolores knows all too well that regeneration is a façade for stronger political motives:

We're not against regeneration, but it's just about keeping the community together. Everybody is being pushed out, and my feelings are that they basically want to keep the rich people in Newham now--well, within Stratford, and push the working class out.

CARP's activist tactics find a powerful way to highlight and challenge the dominant discourse of regeneration. The name itself, "Anti-gentrification tour," draws attention to the fact that what is labeled by government and Olympic authorities as regeneration, is in fact gentrification. The creation of a tour through Stratford also provides an opportunity to educate people on the development effects, with a chance to see the boundaries drawn between favored and neglected space. CARP also planned these tours to run at the same as Olympic-sponsored tours of Stratford. Visitors on the Olympic tour would often ask what other tour was being offered, to which CARP members were very keen to explain to them. This tactic created a force that spoke out against the dominant discourse that promotes groups in power and is rarely questioned by the public.

Although Olympic institutions and private media are tough powers to fight against, CARP's lobbying and demonstrations have helped them garner critical support.

A CARP tour guide explains how their tactics have helped highlight their struggle:

The support generated has been quite powerful. We've been getting stories that have gone out of the UK (via foreign press) and back in, and it's gone viral. And what's happening now is that we are getting some serious legal support ... specializing in issues such as regeneration and helping the communities in issues similar to this.

But most importantly, CARP has produced an alternative voice that spoke out against the rhetoric of politicians and development councils. In my discussion of the activism in the Docklands, I mentioned that activist demonstrations succeeded in providing an alternative discourse that even influenced how mainstream media framed the development. The BBC and UK Guardian, two mainstream media channels prominent in

Britain and internationally, did not often cover many local protests regarding Olympic issues. But both media outlets did cover several stories of CARP's platform against Olympic development, including video footage on The Guardian's website depicting Joe and fellow activists attending council meetings and speaking with Mayor Wales personally without success. Although dominant discourse perpetuates the agenda of those in power, the residents of the Carpenters Estate unleashed smart tactics that presented their arguments against spatial politics in a way that gained critical attention and influenced mainstream media.

#### From Temporary to Permanent Development

The development of Olympic Park has made way for private enterprise to move into Stratford and make what was supposed to be temporary development permanent. On October 25, Newham council approved the proposal for the University College London (UCL) to build its new research facility (Blunden and Martin 2012). 350 residents that have stayed to fight for their homes on the Carpenters Estate will be evicted to make way for this private development. CARP continues their struggle through lobbying at council meetings and networking with a UCL student group that is against the research facility deal. On November 14, the University College London Union (UCLU) Save Carpenters Estate group and CARP held one of its first campaign meetings that will continue to fight against the acquisition.

### Seizure of Public Green Space

Another spatial issue that London residents were affected by was the seizure of natural public space. Along the River Lea of outer east London lie the Leyton and Hackney Marshes. The marshes of the outer East End are a prized possession for the local communities. As one of the last stretches of natural land that had been untouched by urban development, residents of the neighboring boroughs used this land for sport, recreation and an escape from the hectic life of one of the world's most developed global cities. In 2009, and without any consultation with the citizens of the Lea Valley region, the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority (LVRPA) conceded several of the marshes to the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) to prepare build Olympic venues and infrastructure. For example, the East Marsh was paved over to create a parking lot for the transport of Olympic athletes, officials, corporate sponsors, coaches for the disabled, and VIP spectators. The takeover of the marshes was presented as temporary, with the ODA promising to return the affected land by October 15, 2012. However, some of the public land will be seized permanently in contribution to the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, a permanent commemoration of the supposed 2012 Olympic legacy.

### Save Leyton Marsh

The acquisition of the Leyton Marsh was an event that became a catalyst for activism against the Olympic development of east London's marshlands. In the early months of 2012, residents of the neighborhoods surrounding Leyton Marsh were informed that part of the marsh would be developed by the ODA into a temporary training facility for Olympic basketball athletes. This was the last straw for local

residents, who had been subject to various restrictions on the marshes by the ODA for nearly three years. Hence, Save Leyton Marsh, an activist group comprised of local residents of Hackney and Waltham Forest, mobilized into action. Save Leyton Marsh rallied around the following issues:

- The fact that the public was not informed of the construction on Leyton marsh nearly five months after it was approved by the LVRPA, and was given only a month to object to the project.
- The lack of public benefit from the construction and development on the marshlands
- The destruction of the natural marshlands and its environmental unsoundness
- The danger imposed on the public, including the release of asbestos during construction and the uncovering of a WWII UXB device during construction
- The fact that the LVRPA and local councils kept all of these issues concealed from the public, and deceived residents from the truth regarding the construction and its implications on the local community (“History of our Campaign”)

#### Strategic Lobbying and Direct Action

On February 7, members of Save Leyton Marsh visited Waltham Forest’s Planning Committee meeting to lobby against the construction of the Olympic training venue. After unsuccessful attempts to make their case to local planning authorities and councils, the members of Save Leyton Marsh did the only thing they thought would have a drastic impact: direct action on Leyton Marsh. Throughout March and early April, Save Leyton Marsh held community events on the marsh every Saturday to draw attention to the fact that the marshes are supposed to be public recreational land. These community events served as an obstacle to the construction of the Olympic training facility.

The action taken by Save Leyton Marsh began to catch the attention of fellow residents, supporters and activists, which garnered extra assistance for the cause. On March 24, 2012, members of Occupy London began its support of Save Leyton Marsh by

setting up a 24-hour encampment, deemed a Community Support Camp, near the construction site of the Olympic training facility. The presence of Occupy London alarmed local and Olympic authorities. The LVRPA and ODA took this issue to the High Court where two injunctions were placed on protestors at Leyton Marsh—the first prohibiting anyone from serving as an obstruction to the construction of the Olympic facility on the marsh, and the second prohibiting the occupation of the land altogether. The injunctions were placed on participants, referred to as “Persons Unknown”, stating that those identified would be responsible for paying the ODA a £335,000 fine for supposed incurred costs due to the interference with construction. After the injunctions were put into effect, members who were seen demonstrating against the construction of the marsh were deemed responsible of producing the fine on the injunction, as well as £200 individual fines. Several residents who were unable to pay their fines suffered harassment from police and local authorities, with some even being imprisoned for several days.

Upon my first week after having arrived in London, I met with Kev Refuse, a key activist and organizer of Save Leyton Marsh and firm believer in direct action, at the Mile End underground tube station. Since the underground railway does not extend all the way through greater London, Kev kindly offered to pick me up and drive me to the Hackney marshes so I could see the current state of outer east London’s public land. We drove and parked by Kev’s house in the borough of Hackney. He noted that the Olympic Development Authority (ODA) had left notices for him and his neighbors, notifying the residents that the streets of their homes will be used for Olympic parking. The ODA will be giving residents permits that allow them to park their vehicles on their own streets.

Kev noted that regardless of a permit, he and his family would not be able to move their vehicles anytime throughout the Olympic and Paralympic games, as the streets from outer east London would be heavily restricted and flooded with traffic, and there would be no parking available if they were to move their vehicles.

We walked outside of the residential neighborhood to the outskirts of the Hackney marshes. As we crossed the bridge over the River Lea, Kev explained that the marshland we were about to walk across had been used several months ago for a festival to celebrate the upcoming Olympic games. Although the ODA and LVRPA deemed the event a celebration of the local community and its residents, the festival consisted of few local residents, with a greater showing from corporate sponsors and Olympic authorities, volunteers and employees. We walked through the grasslands that were now devastated, post-festival. To our right in the distance, we saw the back of Olympic Park, a monstrous metal structure with a 17.5-kilometre, 5,000-volt electric fence protecting itself from the community that would never be able to enjoy the benefits of the venue.

As we walked along the marshes, Kev explained the history of the Save Leyton Marsh movement and its struggles with the ODA and LVRPA. He was a key participant of the encampment at Leyton Marsh, which was over a month-long struggle. He explains:

We spent nearly a month camped out here, and everyone that passed was supporting us. The majority of people that passed, especially early on, knew nothing about it. And then they were turning up and asking, “What’s going on?” And everyone without exception was outraged that this was allowed to happen. Outraged when you tell them about the planning commissions and their various lies.

The resistance to the encampment and resulting injunctions motivated the residents of surrounding neighborhoods to rally together and demonstrate against Olympic

development of the marshes, either through direct participation or support of the active members. Locals who had not known the residents of their surrounding boroughs came together and formed a coalition against their local councils and elusive Olympic governance. Kev was also at the initial city-planning meeting that approved the Olympic takeover. He explained that at the meeting, there was a strong presence from local residents, several who spoke out against approving the acquisition by the ODA. The motion had passed by one vote, and local council members have since then voiced their regret for approving the development of the marshes. Since then, members of Save Leyton Marsh have attended several council meetings to demand the return of their public land, on-time and back to the natural state it was originally in. Kev noted that the lobbying process has been very tedious since local council members had not been well educated on the development processes that were happening in preparation for the Olympic games. He said:

It's like we've had to educate them as to what is going on. They're the sodding council! But it's become obvious that it doesn't matter. If the ODA says something is going to happen, it will happen. It doesn't matter whether it's illegal, whether it's even got backing from the government of the country. It will just happen.

Kev alluded to a key issue that I heard countless times throughout my time in London: the fact that the London government will concede to any demand from Olympic authorities—local or international—in the name of the legacy of an Olympic host city.

I ended my tour with Kev at Leyton Marsh, where the temporary training venue was near completion. In the middle of this beautiful green marsh stood a stark, grey three-story building with no windows. The training facility was surrounded by a tall, chain-link fence and was guarded by several private security guards at the front gate.

Kev and I discussed the fact that the facility did not look like it was built for the training of world-class athletes. He mentioned that very vague details of the venue's purpose were given by the ODA, and that the true intent of the building was never fully established. Furthermore, local residents were forbidden to be present around the venue, much less actually see the venue from the inside. A main argument to the LVRPA was that if the facility was to promote sports training, then local residents, especially school children interested in sports and recreation, should be able to experience the supposed benefits of the sports facility. But local residents have not been able to share in the excitement of the Olympic Games, and instead have been closed off from their public land, criminalized and fined.

After my initial experience at the Hackney marshes, I had the opportunity to join Save Leyton Marsh in several demonstrations leading up to the Olympic Games. Save Leyton Marsh's tactics worked on two levels: strategic lobbying and direct action. Abi, a member of the campaign who joined later in the spring and has since then been very active in the lobbying side of the operation, explained the dynamics of the movement across activist tactics:

Save Leyton Marsh is a network. It's quite fascinating, really. I actually came on quite late. But I heard about it on the news because the Occupy guys were there. I went to a few meetings and I found very quickly that if you suggested an idea and there was broad support for it, and you went along and did it, great. It is organized in that we have meetings and people collectively agree about what is going to be done. But also, there is also room within that for people to do what they prefer. So there is someone like Kev, for example, who is about nonviolent direct action—getting out on the streets and making his point, whereas I tend to be a bit more about writing letters and lobbying, that sort of thing. And you have Kev saying, 'Yea, go ahead and write some letters, but I think it won't do.' And you have me saying, 'Well, you know, let's not try to shout at that person because we might be able to persuade them on it.' But at the same time, I think everybody respects everybody's points of view. So I think it's got more power.

As previously mentioned, members of Save Leyton Marsh maintained a solid presence at local council meetings to ensure that their demands for the return of the marshlands are met. They also wrote numerous letters to local officials and designated members of the group that would be official delegates between Save Leyton Marsh and the LVRPA, Waltham Forest and Hackney councils, and the ODA. Abi also explains why strategic lobbying is crucial to achieving the organization's goals:

We insisted on having a public meeting, recording it, seeing the reinstatement plan before it went in to the London borough of Waltham Forest, and we won on all of those accounts. We had another meeting and they did actually change the plan, according to what we said. To be fair, we helped rework their plan and to make it stronger, and that's a good thing. And now they're suggesting that we talk with their contractors, which is amazing since at the very first meeting they wouldn't even give us the name of their contractor. They wouldn't even tell us who they were discussing it with. So I think there are achievements.

Save Leyton Marsh's lobbying tactics helped present their case for activism in a thoughtful, rational and convincing manner that would reach local government and regional park authorities. They were able to reach an audience that would repel from direct action, forcing local councils to reason with public residents concerned about the well being of the local community. But Save Leyton Marsh also instilled methods of direct action that communicated a strong presence and solidarity across the boroughs of the marshlands. The community events held on Leyton Marsh maintained the reason demonstrated by members who lobbied at local council meetings, but added a physical reminder that the marshes are intended to be natural public land that should be preserved for use by the local community.

After nearly a month had passed without recognition from local councils, the LVRPA and the ODA, Save Leyton Marsh had no choice but to set up a permanent

encampment. The support from Occupy London was true recognition from London's activist community of the spatial politics that favor the Olympic games over local communities. A member of Occupy London who participated in the encampment discussed with me the importance of realizing spatial politics:

I think space is important. Who owns the land? Nobody should own the land, should they? It highlights that [the Olympic] is all about money...everything around you is about money now and it's about reclaiming that and highlighting it to people. The Olympics is a land grab. For me—morally, ethically—it's about standing up for human beings and against the corporations in a thoughtful way, and also in a physical way.

The Save Leyton Marsh movement is a prime example of how local citizens must question the spatial processes of local governance and influential entities (i.e. Olympic institutions), and challenged the barriers between public and private space. But Save Leyton Marsh also had an opportunity to redefine local spatial boundaries through a new sense of community.

### Result: Community Building

The members of Save Leyton Marsh were faced with spatial injustice similar to the tenants of the Carpenters Estate. Although spatial processes have the potential to break a community apart, members of Save Leyton Marsh experienced a different outcome—community building. As previously mentioned, spatial processes that favor private development over public necessity have the potential to redefine community as a result of struggle across space. The repurposing of the Hackney and Waltham Forest marshes by the ODA affected residents across several boroughs and smaller communities, many of which did not know each other or engage in social activism prior

to Olympic development. The residents of Hackney, Waltham Forest and surrounding neighborhoods all shared their love for their public space in different ways: recreational sports, celebrations and picnics, dog walking, exercise, etc. But in terms of social cohesion and civic participation, these communities were defined by the spatial boundaries set by local councils and park authorities. But when local government failed residents, they had no choice but to mobilize across space and challenge the Olympic authorities that had become to rule over local governance.

Kev discussed the social organization of residents along the marshes prior to counter-Olympic activism: a loosely networked group of user groups divided by various marshes and fields. Kev described the early process of the movement and the failed role of councils and user groups:

A lot of the groups involved around the marshes, they're groups of nature lovers, dog walkers, etc., but they're not protestors. They're not campaigners. And, they're very isolated to their little bit of marsh as well, and weren't talking to each other. Also, they were getting fed information by the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority, so that they could say 'we've been talking to local communities.' But those groups weren't then passing that information on. They weren't making it widely available, which it should have been. Which leads you to wonder why these groups exist. If the marsh is under threat, those users would surely want to know. So a lot of questions have been raised recently about the groups that were here originally—whether or not they're worth having in this scenario.

The local groups that were to support and mobilize their respective communities failed to educate and motivate their residents. Early communities were defined by micro-groups that attended to their own business, using the marshes for their specific personal enjoyment. But the takeover of the marshlands by the ODA created a struggle that made the early communities obsolete. Hence, Save Leyton Marsh facilitated the building of a community that transcended across spatial boundaries.

Through direct action and simultaneous strategic lobbying, the Save Leyton Marsh campaign created a way for activists and supporters to participate in whichever way they wished. Whether it was through sleeping overnight at the encampment on Leyton Marsh, speaking at an LVRPA or council meeting, writing letters to local officials, or simply attending a community event on the marshes, residents could easily educate themselves about crucial public issues and take action. As the campaign progressed from early February until the Olympic games, Save Leyton Marsh became a cohesive network of thoughtful and impassioned citizens turned activists. Abi explains her satisfaction with the coalition that has become a strong presence in local governance:

I do think the campaign has brought together people who wouldn't normally be activists. I think that's a triumph. And what has been quite interesting is that while going to those meetings with the Olympic Delivery Authority, you know who you know. But the loudest voice will always be someone that none of us has ever seen before. So somebody who has turned up, felt the anger in the room, and felt able to express themselves.

Abi explains what I have discussed earlier with regard to how community can be redefined through struggle. I had previously mentioned that Neil Smith believes that place-based struggles turn loosely networked social groups into a cohesive, politicized community defined by the issues they are fighting against (Smith 1993: 106). This is true in the case of the Save Leyton Marsh campaign. Through their tactics of direct action and strategic lobbying, Save Leyton Marsh has created a community defined by its dedication to the preservation of natural public land and refusal to let local government throw it away to the highest bidder. Abi spoke about her perceived success of the community that Save Leyton Marsh has built:

Personally, I think we now represent a group that organizations are a little wary of, because I think we are incredibly intelligent and articulate. And that's what has really amazed me. At how passionate, articulate and intelligent everybody is. And we'll turn

up at a meeting en masse, and we know what we're going to say, we know our facts, and we know the law.

### The Struggle Continues

Save Leyton Marsh continued its campaign from February up to the start of the Olympic Games. During the few weeks preceding the Olympics, Save Leyton Marsh held several community events on the marshes, including a recreational sports day with an ex-athlete of the British Olympic basketball team, a picnic on the marshes to celebrate the end of an alternative torch relay, and demonstrations to support fellow counter-Olympic issues. Due to the impact the campaign has had on challenging Olympic development, most of Save Leyton Marsh's demonstrations were highly guarded by London police, who stood watch at community events while waiting to penalize any member who violated articles of the injunctions previously placed on the group. Although the campaign received much resistance from local councils, park authorities, and the ODA, Save Leyton Marsh became a force that continues to be reckoned with.

Post-Olympics, members of Save Leyton Marsh have continued their lobbying, remaining a strong presence at council meetings and demanding to have a say in the future of the marshlands. The ODA promised to return the land in its original, natural state by October 15, 2012. Abi and fellow members who have built strong relationships with park authorities have demanded for an educated, sustainable reinstatement plan that benefits the local community. Furthermore, the group will remain effective for local residents to protect the land from future private development. Abi describes the allegiance that group members have to protecting the last stretch of natural public land in London:

We would like to put such a ring of steel around that land—the Hackney marshes, Walthamstow marshes and Leyton marshes, up into the Tottenham marshes— that the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority doesn't dare ever, ever try anything like this again. And in the long term they're going to be under more and more pressure to build on the land and license house building on the land. In a sense, I think this is only the beginning.

Abi also notes that she doesn't think the community that is now Save Leyton Marsh would have happened without a catalyst such as the Olympics. She states, "I don't think it would have happened in such a passionate way without the Olympics...although I don't want to credit them with anything positive."

Kev would also agree that throughout all the trials and tribulations, the creation of an engaged, activist community remains a positive outcome:

So the only good thing about the Olympics—the only legacy it is leaving for me—is that it is actually getting local people organized, coordinated, and I have to say, radicalized. Because when you have the full weight of the authorities come down on you, it opens your eyes to a lot of other things. And the local people have had their eyes really opened.

The Olympics have come and gone, but Save Leyton Marsh remains active. The group is currently fighting battle after battle with park authorities and the ODA who remains in operation even though the other Olympic institutions have left. But Save Leyton Marsh has succeeded in challenging the spatial politics caused by the takeover of public space, creating a new space through the creation of a cohesive, politicized and active community.

### Limits to Access

In addition to drastic spatial restrictions such as eviction and government seizure of land, many other limits to space were also imposed on locals to make way for the Olympic games. Access to roads and transportation were restricted in many ways,

making it either dangerous for Londoners to travel, or closing them off completely from using various spaces. For example, the towpath along the River Lea—a pedestrian and cyclist-friendly pathway along the river that allows for safe and easy transport from the outer east end to the center of London—was closed off to limit the chance of security threats and terrorism at the Olympic Stadium. The closing of the towpath formed a spatial boundary that forced London residents to find alternative travel routes, putting pedestrians and cyclists in danger in the crowded and exceptionally congested roadways during the Olympic Games.

The Save Our Towpath campaign mobilized in protest of this transportation restriction. Similar to Save Leyton Marsh's tactics, Save Our Towpath held weekly community events near the path closure to educate the local community and to demand the opening of the path. Just weeks prior to the Olympics, the path was closed, leaving locals without limited access to the center of London. The closing of the towpath provided extra danger, which resulted in the death of a cyclist who was hit by an Olympic vehicle. Although the towpath stayed blocked through the Olympic Games, the community of the outer East End recognized and challenged public restrictions of space.

The roadways throughout London were also restricted through the designation of the "Olympic lanes". These were marked by painted Olympic rings and were designated for vehicles transporting Olympic athletes, officials, VIP and corporate sponsor executives. It was illegal for London citizens and taxi drivers to drive in the Olympic lanes, with a potential £130 fine if violated. The laws for the Olympic lanes went into effect as of July 25, despite complaints from London's taxi system. The Olympic Route Network created substantially greater gridlock throughout London, more so than the

city's traffic congestion. On July 17, 2012—as the first wave of Olympic athletes and officials began to enter London—Cabbies Against Boris occupied the lanes surrounding Parliament Square in protest of Mayor Boris Johnson's refusal to open the lanes to cab drivers. Over 200 cab drivers stalled their taxis in the lanes, making a clear statement against the restrictions of space that local government had made to the public. City and Olympic officials criticized the protests, claiming the demonstration “completely irresponsible” (Lindlar 2012). Yet Cabbies Against Boris garnered more press coverage of this demonstration than they have received over the past year since the organization first mobilized.

Londoners were not only restricted by their access to what should be public space, but they were also forced to adhere to extreme security measures. Private security company, G4S, notorious for their failed security measures throughout the London prison system, was hired to provide security around Olympic Park and official venues. In addition, police forces from outside of London were brought in to regulate and suppress chaos, demonstrations or security threats. Several days before the opening ceremonies, G4S officials claimed that they had underestimated the Olympic project, and would fail to provide the amount of security necessary. This moved LOCOG to enlist an additional 1,200 British military personnel, creating a stronger military presence than the amount of soldiers currently stationed in Afghanistan (Travis 2012). Surface-to-air missile sites were also placed surrounding Olympic Park, to protect the park from potential terrorist attacks. The security and military presence throughout London infringed the civil liberties of locals in the name of protecting London's visitors during the Olympic Games. Anti-securitization groups including No to G4S, Stop the Olympic Missiles and

Lewisham Stop the War Coalition maintained a strong presence leading up to and during the Olympic Games to make a statement that it is not just about access to public space but also the right to feel safe, and free of threat and incrimination, from security and police.

The development in preparation for the 2012 London games is a prime example of how spatial processes affect an Olympic host city. Spatial practices of private development, the seizure of public land, and limits to access can affect urban space enough at it is, while the Olympic institutions accelerate these processes. The results of Olympic development—eviction, the seizure of public land, and the infringement of civil liberties—favor Olympic institutions and private business, at the expense of local citizens. But to understand the full impact of the issues that counter-Olympic activists were faced with and how they navigated spatial practices, we must consider larger, global spatial problems created by the Olympic Games.

## Chapter V: Global Issues on an Olympic Stage

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The 2012 Olympic Games had a great impact on the local politics of London, with a heavy emphasis on private development and drastic spatial processes. Since London is already a prominent global city and one of the most developed urban areas, the Olympics were a strong catalyst for a new wave of conservative spatial politics that further disrupted the low-income communities of outer east London. Although London has seen the consequences of harsh spatial practices—including a long history of eviction, neglect of low-income and minority groups, and riots to fight against these issues—the Olympics as a global institution provide an excuse for local government to unleash spatial tactics that favor private capital at the expense of local communities. While the development in preparation for the Olympics shows us the impact the Olympics have on the local government of its host cities, we must also look at the larger processes the Olympic Games have as an institution. It isn't until the global issues that are either created or enforced through the Olympics that we begin to see the true influence the Olympic Games have on our world.

While looking closely at the effects the Olympic Games can have on global politics and flows of capital, it becomes apparent that the games have an impact on global space, spatial politics and spatial processes. Hence, it is important to look at the larger spatial impact that the games have outside of an Olympic host city. Many activist groups in London—many of which have previous ties to international activism, due to London's role as a major global city—mobilized campaigns specifically to counter the global issues perpetuated by Olympic institutions. In my analysis of global issues at the Olympic

games, I focus on the strongest campaigns—those of anti-corporate sponsorship—because they help shed light on the Olympic Games’ contribution to international issues.

### The Anti-Dow Chemical Campaign

On July 16, 2010, CEO Andrew Liveris announced that Dow Chemical would be a Worldwide Olympic Partner (“Worldwide Olympic Partner”). As is standard with The Olympic Partners Program (TOP), Dow Chemical signed a contract to sponsor the games for eight years starting in 2012 through 2020. As previously mentioned, the development of TOP transformed the Olympic Games and their institutions into the multi-billion dollar industry that they are today. The list of worldwide sponsors includes many corporate giants, including Coca-Cola, McDonalds, Visa, and General Electric. These corporations have been deeply engrained into Olympic culture, and are now something that is standard practice and not often questioned. But Dow Chemical’s entrance into the world sponsor program created quite a controversy due to the corporation’s history of social irresponsibility.

Dow Chemical is a multi-national chemical corporation based in the United States, with plants and operations worldwide. The company claims that the sponsorship is an attempt to promote the Dow Chemical brand on a worldwide platform. But Dow did not consider the amount of resistance and protest it would receive, and the overall impact of this controversy on the company’s reputation.

The most powerful example of Dow Chemical’s negative legacy is the Bhopal disaster of 1984. On December 3, 1984, a Union Carbide pesticide plant combusted, releasing methyl isocyanate into the air affecting over 80,000 citizens in some way, shape

or form. Those affected suffered from health effects ranging from mild to severe, and over 2,500 humans died within the week after the reaction occurred (Dhara 2002). The Bhopal tragedy remains the world's biggest industrial disaster. In 2001, Union Carbide became a full subsidiary of Dow Chemical. Neither corporation has yet to repair the damage in Bhopal and bring justice to its victims. Dow Chemical claims that since they did not own Union Carbide at the time of the disaster, they should not be held accountable for the healthcare of victims and the cleanup of the area that remains highly contaminated. The lack of social justice for the victims of Bhopal has sparked a worldwide network of advocacy that is soon approaching its 30-year anniversary.

Immediately after the announcement of the Dow Chemical Olympic sponsorship, the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal (ICJB) sprang into action with demonstrations in protest of the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) lack of responsibility in choosing worldwide sponsors. But the amount of money and in-kind donations that Dow would provide to the games spoke louder than the cries of the victims of Dow's corporate practices. Anti-Dow activism remained mostly led by the ICJB while they lobbied for the IOC to reconsider the sponsorship, with talks of India possibly boycotting the games. But it was the London Organizing Committee of the Olympic Games' (LOCOG) approval for a £7 million Olympic stadium wrap, sponsored by Dow Chemical, that jumpstarted an anti-Dow campaign in London.

The Bhopal Medical Appeal is a London-based organization that started in 1994 to mark the tenth anniversary of the disaster. The support for the original appeal was so great that it allowed the BMA to build the Sambhavna Trust Clinic, a free community healthcare clinic that has treated over 35,000 victims to date (*The Bhopal Medical*

*Appeal*). As previously mentioned, the BMA was compelled to start its anti-Dow campaign in London when LOCOG approved the Dow Chemical-sponsored Olympic stadium wrap. Since the BMA's main goal is to support its medical clinics in Bhopal, it had previously decided to keep its mission separate of the ICJB. Although the BMA and ICJB are tightly networked, the ICJB campaigns across a larger spectrum of social justice, whereas the BMA focuses on its role as a medical appeal. Colin Toogood, media and campaign director of the BMA, first explains why the BMA did not start its campaign after the announcement of the worldwide sponsorship, and then discusses the role of the organization's opportunity to bring this international issue to London.

We didn't because we felt it was a bit out of our jurisdiction. It was a big international issue, and we felt we wouldn't have had a great amount of success of taunting. Now when the London deal was announced last August, it was predicated on them (Dow) having really high visibility in London. And that's with this stadium wrap, which was a bit of a red herring. When that was announced, we thought instantly, 'We have to do something.'

Hence, the Bhopal Medical Appeal launched its campaign to fight LOCOG and Dow's presence in London.

#### Local Impact with Transnational Support

The anti-Dow campaign led by the BMA and supporting organizations heavily relied on the tactics previously discussed by activist groups that were fighting local issues. In addition, the anti-Dow organizations built a transnational network that allowed the campaign to gain additional significance. The network for social justice in Bhopal has been extensively built over the past three decades. The BMA utilized its network and added to it in efforts to build an impact in London for its Olympic-specific campaign. As mentioned in my literature discussion, activism against spatial practices not only includes

navigating physical space, but also metaphorical space. The networking tactics of the anti-Dow campaign therefore created a movement that transcended both local and global space.

On the local level, the BMA was able to garner initial support by using its already existent supporters. Colin states:

We're a small UK organization, and [the Olympics] is now in our backyard. And it was brought out by a response that we got from our supporter database, which although they're a great group of supporters and they're very committed people, we don't get much response from them on a day-to-day basis. And when the London deal was announced, we got a load of emails asking what we were going to do about it. And it made it very obvious that we had to commence this campaign.

Through strategic lobbying, the BMA was also able to gain critical support from London officials, including a London member of parliament and assembly members, Navin Shah and Darren Johnson. The BMA created a new argument that was different from what is typically presented through ICJB and fellow social justice campaigns. Past advocacy has highlighted the actual disaster and lack of accountability from Union Carbide and Dow Chemical. Dow's position has been that they did not own the facility at the time of the disaster. So the BMA shifted to the fact that there remains ongoing contamination in Bhopal that Dow Chemical has yet to clean up:

I've produced a strategy document, which explains that we would go in from the medical appeal's perspective. And we'd take a really tight focus in what element of our argument we were presenting. At the very early stage, we presented this argument to some politicians... and explained that it has nothing to do with the gas disaster. And this is true. So it's a separate disaster. The paper that I presented to the politicians and journalists at the early stage described the ongoing contamination, to say this has nothing to do with the gas disaster.

Therefore, by focusing its argument, the BMA was able to frame a large, international issue in a way that would encourage local advocacy. Assembly Member Navin Shah was

the first member of the London Assembly to support the anti-Dow campaign. He has been previously involved in the campaign for justice in Bhopal, since he is from Indian descent and is the representative of London boroughs, Brent and Harrow, both of which have strong Indian ethnic populations. Assembly Member Shah feels strongly about the campaign for Bhopal and London's role in supporting this issue. He describes the process of lobbying to have Dow Chemical's sponsorship in London revoked, and his thoughts on the success of the campaign:

I'm extremely disappointed and angry...I didn't realize how commercial, how business-minded, international Olympic committees are...they don't care about sustainability or ethics. I have been lobbying Lord Sebastian Coe...LOCOG...the international Olympics Committee...it's all been to deaf ears. Our efforts at that level have not been successful, but there's a bigger picture to this as well. That's the legacy that this campaign will leave behind...I'm looking beyond these Olympics.

Assembly Member Shah proposed a motion at the London Assembly that deems the Dow sponsorship as an assault to London's reputation. The motion states that the Assembly "feels the IOC and national organising committees should consider the environmental, social, ethical and human rights records of companies when awarding high-profile partnership and sponsorship deals" ("London 2012 Olympics"):

That motion we had, the resolution at City Hall last week, was exactly about that. That it's still not too late for them [the International Olympic Committee], for future games, to seriously put in practice all the good things they talk about. And as far as Bhopal is concerned, this is only a small part of the campaign. The Olympic is just one aspect of the campaign...the campaign will continue.

Therefore, the anti-Dow Chemical campaign was able to transform an international issue into a matter of concern for local government.

Along with lobbying for local, political impact, the BMA also had support from a newly created organization, Drop Dow Now. Since the BMA had a reputation to sustain as a medical appeal and nonprofit organization, the organization was limited to the lengths at which they could demonstrate in efforts to retain their professional networks and reputation. Drop Dow Now was the main organizer of stunty demonstrations, including “die-in” demonstrations and additional protests at LOCOG offices and city hall. The organizations also helped to increase solidarity as the ICJB, as the BMA was dedicated to keeping their focus on the medical appeal’s perspective. Drop Dow Now helped coordinate international days of solidarity throughout the counter-Olympic campaign, in which supporters for the cause could send pictures and statements of solidarity, which would continue throughout global times zones and posted in real time on Drop Dow Now and the BMA’s websites. As a result, the anti-Dow campaign was able to use tactics that considered both physical and metaphorical space.

While anti-Dow activists took advantage of direct occupation as physical reminders of their platforms, the anti-Dow campaign also challenged space through its transnational networks. I previously discussed Neil Smith’s concept of scale bending, which suggests that issues have the potential to presented in various spatial scales. Jules Boykoff also used Smith’s theory and applied it to activism at the 2010 winter Olympic games in Vancouver. Boykoff discusses how Vancouver activists the unique opportunity the Olympic presented in highlighting local issues to an international audience. The same is true for London, but the impact is magnified by both the prominence of the Summer Games in comparison to the Winter Games, and also London’s importance as a global city. Much like Vancouver activists, the BMA and its aligned groups presented their

argument against Dow Chemical in a manner that was prominent locally and internationally, which challenged pre-defined boundaries of scale.

The anti-Dow campaign took advantage of physical spatial tactics in addition to its scale bending techniques. Because the BMA was so strategic in its lobbying and demonstration tactics, they were able to build a positive reputation with local and Olympic officials to support its demonstrations leading up to the games. The process to obtain approval for protest space on opening day of the Olympics was a long and extensive process for the BMA. The organization enlisted a legal firm to help make its case for a peaceful protest that would coincide with what LOCOG defined as “legitimate protest”. Since the BMA led a campaign that had remained peaceful and without any disruption, the group knew they had a proper case for approval. Hence, the BMA contacted London Metropolitan police to request a protest space near an entrance of Olympic Park. The BMA and its legal supporters were prepared to file for a judicial review, should the protest not be allowed. But the potential for legal implications, bad press and enhanced protest persuaded London Metropolitan Police to facilitate the obtainment of a protest spot. Since the space in question was privately owned, the police directed the BMA to the Westfield Group, the corporation who built a shopping mall at Olympic Park and therefore owned a decent portion of the land. Colin was able to discuss the BMA’s case for a peaceful protest with Westfield’s head of Olympic security, who appreciated the organization’s reasonable approach, and therefore gave the go ahead for the only official Olympic Park protest.

The approval from LOCOG and Olympic security was a success that separated the anti-Dow campaign from the others, as it was the only campaign to be given

“official” protest space on private land. The demonstration held true to the theme of the BMA and Drop Dow Now’s past counter-Olympic protests—short stunts that challenged discourse, provoked thought, and attracted media attention. The anti-Dow campaign’s officially-approved demonstration on opening day of the Olympics Games is a prime example of successful outcomes that can arise from strategically networking creative spatial tactics.

### The “Official” Olympic Die-In

On July 27, 2012, the day of the opening ceremonies of the 2012 Olympic Games, the Bhopal Medical Appeal (BMA) and its supporters gathered at the exit of the Stratford underground station. As a culmination of a nearly yearlong campaign, the BMA, its networked organizations, and fellow supporters were able to make one last prominent statement. The anti-Dow demonstrators were asked to arrive by 11am at the corridor between Stratford Station and the Westfield shopping center. Any demonstrators who did not show by 11am would not be able to participate in the demonstration, due to security restrictions. Nearly 40 Bhopal activists arrived to participate in the demonstration. The group consisted of the extensive network of supporters the BMA has built: organizers and supporters of Drop Dow Now, Assembly Member’s Navin Shah and Darren Johnson, employees and members of Amnesty International, organizers from the British-Vietnam network, and the various volunteers that had supported the BMA’s previous action.

Security guards of the Olympic park met the group and escorted them to the demonstration site—a barricaded spot in front of the walkway between the entrance to the

Olympic stadium and neighboring venues. Although the protest space was not directly in front of the Olympic stadium entrance, it was strategically placed in the sense that if the demonstration site was right below a large advertisement for Dow Chemical, highlighting the corporation as an Olympic worldwide sponsor.

It was pouring rain as the anti-Dow protestors began to lie on the floor for a “die-in”—a demonstration tactic the group had used previously throughout the past year. The intent of the die-in is to show a physical sign of solidarity with the victims of the Bhopal disaster. The demonstrators laid on the ground with shrouds that read, “Justice for Bhopal”, over their bodies in bright, red and black letters. Meredith Alexander, the ex-commissioner for a Sustainable London 2012, gave a short speech on the travesty of the Dow Chemical sponsorship and the toxic legacy it is leaving behind, while media surrounded the protest space.

Additional speakers, including Assembly Member Navin Shah, were scheduled to say a few words on the significance of the demonstration. But the demonstration was cut short as the media seemed to have garnered sufficient coverage of the official Olympic protest story. Assembly Member Shah, representatives from Amnesty International, and other experts on the issue were kept busy with interviews from various media. After 30 minutes, the demonstration was wrapping up, as the demonstrators tried to dry themselves off. The anti-Dow activists stayed congregated at the protest space for a short while, discussing the presence of media and their thoughts on the demonstration. Many were surprised that the demonstration occurred with legitimate approval in the first place, much less without any major altercations from security officials. Others had wished the

demonstration had lasted longer and that all those who were scheduled to speak had a chance to share their stories.

The anti-Dow Chemical campaign is a perfect example of how larger international issues can impact a local scale, and furthermore, how activist groups can use spatial tactics to create new opportunities for activism. Colin explains the unique opportunity the Olympics and this particular campaign have created for the BMA:

It's really important to look at the way the press works in this country and the way the press works in India. It's also important to understand that if you remove the Olympics from the equation, if anything happens that's Bhopal related—they're very experienced in India, and they can get stuff into the press really, really easily. But it doesn't get into the press here. And we've been learning that there are different ways to approach it. And we were very, very lucky with this that we've been given a completely unprecedented opportunity.

Colin sheds light on an important concept that sets the anti-corporate sponsor campaigns apart from the local campaigns previously discussed. The intent of the anti-Dow campaigns demonstrations, especially the one opening day, was to gain the attention of media, as opposed to attracting passerby and reclaiming the actual space they were using in protest. Because the BMA is removed from the physical space in Bhopal that makes the case for social justice relevant, the Olympics were the perfect opportunity to highlight how this global issue is of local concern. Therefore, the anti-Dow campaign created a new discursive space that had not be available previously in London. The creation of this space allowed the BMA to attract more media attention to the Bhopal disaster than previously possible in London, while also utilizing the Olympic worldwide platform to extend this discursive space internationally. Assembly Member Shah also points out the importance of creating discursive space:

Raising awareness is critical, so people know what is going on. At that level we have been pretty successful and I am glad. We're getting support from all kinds of sources which we didn't before.

The efforts of the BMA and its supporters gained critical press coverage and provided much resistance against Dow Chemical and LOCOG. The negative press generated about the sponsorship labeled Dow's sponsorship as one of the top public relations disasters of 2011, forever changing the discourse regarding Dow as an Olympic sponsor (Sudhaman and Holmes 2012). Colin explains:

People now can go out there and have a conversation about the Olympics. Mention the sponsorship issue and probably one of the first things they mention is Dow and Bhopal. Whereas a year ago people didn't even know what it was.

Although Dow Chemical remains a worldwide Olympic sponsor, the campaign against Dow in London was a success for bringing its corporate irresponsibility to the Olympic stage.

### The Most Unethical Olympic Sponsor

In addition to the anti-Dow campaign, there were also strong voices speaking out against two other main Olympic sponsors: British Petroleum (BP) and Rio Tinto. Both of these corporations are not members of the TOP worldwide program, but were specifically chosen to sponsor the London Olympics due to their prominence in Britain's industry. Rio Tinto was chosen as the official sponsor to provide the athletes' medals, and BP was chosen as a London 2012 Sustainability Partner. The London Olympics set a goal to be the most sustainable games to date, and these corporate sponsors were supposedly chosen to fulfill this mission. Much like the announcement of Dow's worldwide sponsorship, the selection of Rio Tinto and BP as London 2012 sponsors

created quite a controversy amongst activists and sustainability buffs, as both corporations have reputations of being the exact opposite of sustainable.

The Commission for a Sustainable London 2012 was an organization created to specifically ensure that the games would achieve its sustainability goals through monitoring “the sustainability plans, objectives and progress of the organisations responsible for building and delivering the London 2012 Games” (“About”). Meredith Alexander was chosen to be a commissioner for the group. Through her position as commissioner, she was given responsibility in vetting the sponsorship deal between Dow Chemical and LOCOG. Alexander contested the Dow Chemical-sponsored wrap at Olympic Stadium, but LOCOG stayed firm in its decision, making it clear that they were satisfied with the sponsorship. The approval of this deal was a prime example of the discord between London 2012’s sustainability rhetoric and the reality of the games’ irresponsible corporate sponsors. The finalization of the Dow-LOCOG sponsorship was too much for Alexander, motivating her to resign from the sustainability commission:

When I looked into it, it was very clear cut that Dow Chemical is a company that now bears responsible for the Bhopal tragedy. I was very clear that Dow Chemical was not a suitable sponsor for a games that wanted to be as sustainable as possible. London had no choice that they were an Olympic sponsor, on an international level, but they did make a choice when they allowed Dow Chemical to have the wrap for the stadium. Unfortunately the commission ended up putting out a public statement to the contrary that said [the deal] was a sustainable decision, and I tried to get that statement changed. When that wasn’t possible, I resigned. My aim in resigning was to make sure that the story of the victims was told as publicly as possible.

Alexander’s resignation garnered much attention from the media, putting her in the foreground of the conversation regarding London’s 2012 ethical practices. As previously mentioned, Meredith Alexander was instrumental in forming Drop Dow Now, the organization in charge of the demonstration stunts to support the anti-Dow campaign.

But Alexander also became the main spokesperson for a larger coalition between groups demonstrating against Dow, BP and Rio Tinto: the Greenwash Gold campaign.

Just as the groups that fought against Dow Chemical aligned to form its own Olympic-specific movement, there were separate anti-BP and anti-Rio Tinto campaigns vying for space on the Olympic protest platform. The anti-BP campaign was spearheaded by the UK Tar Sands Network (UKTSN), a London-based organization that advocates for victims of tar sands oil deposits in Canada, as a result of the business practices of BP and other British corporations. Members of UKTSN also formed an offspring initiative, the Reclaim Shakespeare Company, which uses theatrical performances and flash mobs to challenge BP's sponsorship of the arts in London. Reclaim Shakespeare and the UKTSN were also used to using space in creative ways in order to attract media attention, similar to the BMA. The anti-Rio Tinto campaign was led by the London Mining Network (LMN), an advocacy group for the rights of miners, which also networked with similar groups, including the United Steel Workers that were based in Canada, to form a transnational campaign. In efforts to put all of these anti-corporate sponsor movements on the Olympic political podium, the Greenwash Gold campaign commenced.

The Greenwash Gold campaign began on April 17, 2012. The goal of the coalition was to bring together the crucial issues presented by the Bhopal Medical Appeal, UK Tar Sands Network, and the London Mining Network by creating a competition for the Olympics Games' most unethical corporate sponsor. The Greenwash Gold website included videos endorsing each campaign, with complete information on why each corporate sponsor is "greenwashed." Visitors to the site could vote for which

company they think is the worst corporate sponsor, and share the videos and information via social media. Greenwash Gold also planned physical demonstrations similar to those planned by Drop Dow Now, including a protest outside of LOCOG headquarters. A crucial demonstration from the campaign was the final ceremony planned to award the bronze, silver and gold medals to the most greenwashed corporate sponsors.

### The Greenwash Gold Awards Ceremony

On July 20, 2012, the Greenwash Gold coalition of the BMA, UK Tar Sands Network and London Mining Network held its award ceremony for the most greenwashed corporate sponsor of the 2012 Olympic games. Prior to the award ceremony, Meredith Alexander and the main organizers of all three organizations attempted to deliver medals to all three corporate-sponsors' offices in London, filming the reaction as they reached the doorsteps of each headquarters. They were turned away each time without speaking to a representative of each corporate sponsor.

At 12pm, supporters who knew about the award ceremony began to congregate below the steps of Trafalgar Square—a very prominent public space in the heart of central London that is near many landmarks and tourist attractions—near the giant clock that counted down the days, hours and minutes until the Olympic games. Many visitors stood near the clock to take pictures, while Meredith Alexander and her counterparts marched down the stairs near the base of the clock, setting up a three-tiered podium. Meredith welcomed everyone to the 2012 Greenwash Gold award ceremonies. Those who were aware of the event clapped and cheered, while the general public looked onward in confusion. She introduced the three representatives of Dow Chemical, Rio Tinto and

BP—main organizers of the their respective anti-corporate sponsor campaigns who pretended to be official spokesmen of each corporation.

Meanwhile, community support officers who were stationed at Trafalgar Square became suspicious of the commotion being caused near the Olympic countdown clock. They disrupted Meredith while she professionally explained that the square is public space where peaceful demonstration is allowed. The support officers stood back, but also rushed to call for reinforcements via walkie-talkie. After the brief disruption, Meredith awarded the bronze medal for the Greenwash Gold competition to Dow Chemical. A man dressed in a suit and a large, Lord Sebastian Coe, paper-mâché head awarded a BMA representative as he stood atop the podium. Colin, president of the Bhopal Medical Appeal, stood in front of the podium holding a BMA banner, and stated that through the acceptance of the medal, the BMA stood in solidarity with the victims of Bhopal and other disasters caused by Dow Chemical. British Petroleum (BP) joined Dow Chemical as it accepted its silver medal, while a representative from the UK Tar Sands Network gave another acceptance speech. While the ceremony proceeded, Over 20 London metropolitan police appeared at Trafalgar Square and surrounded the demonstration.

Finally, the gold medal was given to the London 2012 sponsor and British corporation, Rio Tinto—the official provider of all the Olympic athletes’ medals. The corporation has a history of irresponsible and unsustainable mining practices (“Rio Tinto for the Greenwash Gold”). Rio Tinto’s fake corporate executive represented by the London Mining Network took the top of the podium to receive the gold medal. At that moment, fellow demonstrators began to pour green custard over the three medal winners on the podium, symbolizing the greenwashing of these three corporate sponsors. The

green custard fell onto the pavement of Trafalgar Square, as metropolitan police swarmed the podium. Since the custard was a supposed unquestionable substance, the police began to question those involved in the custard-spilling portion of the demonstration, resulting in their arrest due to criminal damage. A fellow supporter of the demonstration was even arrested for helping clean up the custard. A total of seven people were arrested due to what was a peaceful demonstration, theatrical skit, and ultimately wholesome fun. The seven arrestees spent a full day at the police station and were finally let out on bail, with their sentence to be reconsidered after the Olympic games. Those charged of criminal damage were given anti-social behavior orders (ASBOs)—a recently revived trend used by authorities to limit the amount of protesters throughout the Olympic games—which prohibit them from being near any Olympic venue or sponsored event.

### Creating Discursive Space

The mission of the Greenwash Gold campaign was to shed light on the larger social issues created by the business practices of Dow Chemical, BP and Rio Tinto, and the irresponsibility of the Olympic sponsorship program. Similar to all of the activist campaigns I have previously mentioned, Greenwash Gold applied a range of tactics to communicate its message. But this particular campaign excelled in creating discursive space—a metaphorical space to question and challenge dominant, pro-Olympic rhetoric. I previously discussed the concept of discursive space, in which a group can create a space through an alternative narrative. Jules Boykoff discussed the discursive space created by activists at the Vancouver games, which he also labeled as another means of scale bending.

The Greenwash Gold campaign is a crucial example of creating discursive space because the campaign focused on generating discussion that would transcend space via conversation and media. The use of cutting edge graphics on the Greewash Gold website and the use of YouTube and various social media helped to create a cohesive campaign that would attract support from those who may not be reached via traditional protest. This format also gave the BMA, UKTSN and LMN opportunities to share the campaign throughout their own transnational networks. The campaign itself was based on voting and online interaction, with which supporters could engage from anywhere in the world. Greenwash Gold created a conversation that attracted activists, non-activists, Londoners and foreigners, defying space and demographic.

While the Greenwash Gold campaign extended through global networks, it also held a strong physical presence through demonstrations in London. These demonstrations were purposely designed to create discursive space, as they were aimed at attracting media more so than occupying space itself. Locals that countered issues in their own communities in London took to direct action with the intent of reclaiming physical space that had been taken from them. But it was clear that Greenwash Gold aimed to present its platform across a larger, global space, and the campaign was successful in doing just that. The Greenwash Gold award ceremony garnered much attention from media, especially after the custard-induced arrests of seven activists.

But as Greenwash Gold helped spread the larger conversation about corporate irresponsibility, it also helped local organizations in London that have dedicated their mission to advocating for these issues. As previously mentioned, the opportunity presented by the Olympics helped the BMA spread its message, and it did just the same

for the UK Tar Sands Network and the London Mining Network. In fact, the anti-corporate sponsor movements may have been so successful because there is a strong presence of organizations in London that are dedicated to international social issues. The London Olympics provided an ultimate opportunity for activism because of the strong ties between British big business and the UK-based organizations that were created to hold these corporations accountable. Meredith Alexander spoke on her success of the campaign:

I think it's definitely helped raise awareness. The companies in question are spending millions on their Olympic sponsorship, their advertisement, their branding. And we're a group of volunteers...we don't have a budget. So with our ability to tell the other side of the story...we've got what we got, we just have ourselves. But we have a passionate commitment to making sure that people know the truth. I think the people we've been able to reach have really seen a different side to these companies.

Therefore, the Greenwash Gold campaign created a discursive space to advocate for some of the most crucial international issues across global networks, while also presenting the same issues on local level through physical demonstration.

### The Counter-Olympic Network

In addition to the various networks that each activist group utilized for their respective campaigns, there was also a communal effort to combine all efforts into a complete network for activism. The Counter Olympic Network (CON) was created in order to facilitate action and support for all the various counter-Olympic causes, regardless of issue or spatial scale. One of the main organizers of the network was an ex-resident of Clays Lane, the housing cooperative that was demolished to make way for the

Olympic Park. CON provided an outlet to publicize each activist group demonstrations and announce news about Olympic practices.

In my introduction I mentioned the protest march during the opening weekend of the Olympic games. This demonstration was created by CON, whose main organizers comprised of representatives of other campaigns as well as general counter-Olympic supporters. Prior to the march, CON had mainly served as a platform to network across the London 2012 activism. The counter-Olympic march was the only other demonstration on opening week beside the anti-Dow protest to receive sufficient media coverage. The incredible support of nearly 40 activist groups and Londoners who had seen the dark side of Olympic practices convened to make a communal statement for others to question the Olympic institution.

The counter-Olympic Network can also help explain the role of space through the support or lack thereof from the activist groups I have previously discussed. For example, there was a lack of presence at the march from CARP and similar groups who were victims of eviction. CARP members expressed their support for CON and the general counter-Olympic movement, but made it clear that the main goal of CARP's campaign was to protect their homes, an effort that absorbed all of the group's time and effort. Members of Save Leyton Marsh showed a strong presence throughout the march, as they had become a strong example of local mobilization. Trade unions, anti-securitization groups, and various London advocacy groups were also at the march, since they too had realized the Olympics' role in perpetuating injustice. The anti-corporate sponsor campaigns I had previously mentioned also supported CON. Although, it is important to note that Drop Dow Now was the official anti-Dow sponsor of CON, since

the BMA chose not to be affiliated with CON in order to protect its reputation as a peaceful protest organization. Another important element of the CON march was the presence of activists from future Olympic host cities. No Sochi 2014 and Rio on Watch are two organizations that have already mobilized to challenge Olympic development in the next two destinations for the games.

Looking at the larger network of counter-Olympic activists can shed light on the dynamics within London activism, and also the freedom and limitations created by the many new definitions of space. While there was widespread general support for the Counter-Olympic Network, activists remained dedicated to their respective causes, as it became clear that each activist group was focused on protecting the various spaces they had worked so hard to maintain. But the 2012 London Olympic Games has laid important groundwork for the future of not only Olympic activism, but activism in general.

## Chapter VI: Scaling the Local and Global through Activism

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I have previously discussed the ways in which activists at the 2012 London Olympic Games demonstrated against local and global issues. Activist groups mobilized against critical issues affecting the development and spatial boundaries throughout the boroughs of outer east London. Preparation for the Olympic Games in the outer East End provided an excuse for local councils to unleash spatial practices that favored private enterprise over local necessity.

The development of the boroughs surrounding the Olympic park resulted in spatial issues including eviction, the seizure of green spaces, and overall restrictions to public space. In response, activist groups used space in exceptional ways to lobby for their causes and reclaim their right to the land. For example, the Carpenters Against the Regeneration Plan continues to suffer the gradual eviction of tenants to make way for private land grabs. The group's anti-gentrification tours challenged the dominant discourse of regeneration by showing physical evidence of the local government's neglect of the local community. Save Leyton Marsh's lobbying and direct action formed a new community that bonded residents of the boroughs along the marshes, creating a new space formed by a shared cause for activism.

There was also a strong presence from groups that challenged larger spatial processes that the Olympic Games have come to perpetuate. Many advocacy organizations already established in London received an unprecedented opportunity to challenge the social issues created by key Olympic corporate sponsors. The anti-Dow Chemical campaign was able to garner support for its cause through scale bending tactics.

For example, The Bhopal Medical Appeal was able to enlist support from its transnational network on a global scale, while building a local reputation that gave the campaign access to official protest space at Olympic Park. Through transcending scale, the anti-Dow campaign was able to convey the larger links between the Olympics and global economic processes. The Greenwash Gold campaign was able to control a more metaphorical sense of space through the creation of discursive space against dominant, pro-Olympic rhetoric. With ex-commissioner for a sustainable London 2012, Meredith Alexander, as its spokesperson, the coalition of the BMA, UK Tar Sands Network and London Mining Network created a space to speak out against the irresponsible practices of Dow Chemical, BP and Rio Tinto.

All of the activist campaigns I discussed used a combination of lobbying, direct action and networking tactics. But there are key differences between the campaigns against local and global issues in how and why they used space. Those fighting against local spatial issues were doing so in efforts to physically reclaim rights to the land. In the case of the Carpenters Estate, private development has forced them out of their homes without any promise of proper relocation. Therefore, the Carpenters Against the Regeneration Plan used spatial tactics to fight for physical space that they were at risk of losing. Similarly, Save Leyton Marsh demonstrated against physical space that was unrightfully taken away from the public. Both groups used strategic lobbying and direct action to communicate their goal, which was to repossess these physical spaces. Furthermore, both groups wanted to ensure that the local government never concedes to private development without consultation from the public.

The anti-corporate campaigns enlisted the same tactic, but with a different goal in mind. The organizations involved in the anti-Dow and Greenwash Gold campaigns were not campaigning to claim physical space, but rather to create a new sense of space that challenges scale and geographical restrictions. The Bhopal Medical Appeal and its supporters bended scale by focusing their transnational campaign to a local level that impacted London legislation and the future of Olympic corporate sponsorship. By combining international and global efforts, the anti-Dow campaign was able to communicate the larger links between corporate irresponsibility and the discord that corporate sponsors have with the Olympic ideals.

The Greenwash Gold campaign helped to create a discursive space in which the three main anti-corporate sponsor campaigns could challenge dominant, pro-Olympic discourse. The coalition against corporate sponsors showed a strong presence and allowed for discussion that questioned the corporatization of the Olympics, as well as the larger social issues these partnerships raise. Although anti-Dow and Greenwash Gold enlisted similar demonstration tactics similar to those demonstrating against local issues—in fact, demonstrations that were more controversial than local activists’—these tactics were with the intent of challenging spatial processes instead of reclaiming the space many have fallen victim to. Therefore, they created a metaphorical space by using physical space to demonstrate their cause. In fact, these campaigns had more freedom in their use of space, since activists of local issues were confined to demonstrating in the space they attempted to reclaim. The innovative ways in which the anti-corporate sponsor campaigns used public space (i.e. Trafalgar Square in the case of the Greenwash Gold awards ceremony) was provocative enough to attract media attention, which was

the ultimate goal in communicating the issues these groups had with Olympic corporate sponsorship. These demonstrations transcended scale using physical space in London as a platform to highlight the campaigns' issues on the international Olympic platform.

The activist groups advocating for local and global issues had different goals, but they can learn from one another in significant ways. The local issue groups including CARP and Save Leyton Marsh challenged spatial discourse through advocating their right to public land, while mobilizing and forming unique communities that continue to help them challenge local government. Because their space is threatened by spatial practices, these groups have also run their campaigns with a fervor and resilience that the other campaigns could learn from. While the anti-corporate campaign disseminated into their respective advocacy groups and fizzled out, the local coalitions remain strong and continue to fight until justice is achieved.

But the anti-corporate campaigns can teach local groups important lessons on how to leverage their campaigns to gain international support. Although the local groups' campaigns were defined by the struggle for physical space, there is potential to use scale bending tactics to gain international support, as spatial processes create similar issues worldwide. A member of Drop Dow Now picked up on the ways in which local and global issues can find common ground:

I think that it's really brilliant to bring everything together. When you have massive multi-national corporations sponsoring the Olympics, it cannot fail to be an international issue as well as a local issue. I think that's the way that I look at it. It's really, really brilliant that the links are being drawn between all of these issues...So I think it's kind of understood by a lot of people that the Olympics is used to showcase massive, multi-national corporate brands, and so that is part of the reason why these people are being affected on the local level. When you frame it in that sense, then you can have solidarity between then people who are being refused access to common land like the people in Leyton, with

people who are being poisoned in Bhopal. You can make the link through having that approach.

If activists for both local and global issues can learn from one another's strengths, social activism has the potential to liberate itself from the restraints of geographical and metaphorical space.

### Conclusion

Through my analysis of activist tactics at the 2012 London Olympic Games, I demonstrate how the Olympics play a unique role in the construction of space, and the social effects of these spatial processes. Olympic practices and institutions challenge typical definitions of space and the ways in which space can be used. I explain how the Olympic games affect space on two levels. Space is affected on a local level through the development in preparation for the Olympic Games and influence on the local government of its host cities. In addition, the Olympic Games affect global processes through its establishment as a global institution.

Contemporary geographical theory addresses the fact that space is not stagnant and demarcated by rigid boundaries. In fact, space is transcendent through geographic scale via social processes. Therefore, a progressive sense of space is necessary to understand how community and scale can be redefined through local and global spatial practices. I discuss critical theory about how the Olympic Games affect global politics, culture, and global spatial practices. Through applying spatial theory to Olympic theory, we are able to understand a whole new dimension of Olympic influence.

My qualitative research and analysis sought to gain an on-the-ground account of the challenges that spatial processes and politics that the activists of London 2012 were

faced with. Through interviews with activists from a variety of groups, and observations of demonstrations leading up to and during the opening ceremonies, I was able to understand not only the issues that activists were battling, but also their thoughtful approaches to tackling local and global social issues. The local issue groups continue to bring countless arguments against private development to their local councils, while mobilizing more and more locals to get involved. The anti-corporate sponsor groups continue to advocate for victims of corporate irresponsibility, while expanding their networks across the globe.

As the world continues to become more complex through processes that challenge spatial boundaries, social activism must also transform to compete with the social issues that transcend physical and metaphorical space. Achieving a progressive sense of space based on social processes is crucial for a new wave of activism that can counter powerful economic processes. The Olympic Games provides a unique situation that uncovers the intricacies of space and the various ways in which public and private entities utilize it. By uncovering the influence the Olympic Games have on spatial processes, we unlock the potential to mobilize activist campaigns that transcend scale in order to build impact.

The struggle continues as the Olympics move to Sochi, Russia in 2014 for the Winter Games, and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil for the 2016 Summer Games. As previously mentioned, No Sochi 2014 launched a campaign that would allow them to demonstrate prior to the games in Russia, as activist voices will be most likely suppressed. Drastic development is already underway in Rio de Janeiro, where space is possibly the most at stake. Land is being cleared to make way for Olympic venues and infrastructure, while thousands of favela residents are being evicted from their homes. Catalytic Communities,

a nonprofit organization that advocates for favela residents in Rio, formed “Rio on Watch,” a community-reporting medium that allows residents to report and publish online the problems caused by Olympic development.

It seems that both Sochi and Rio activists have learned key lessons from London activists, and are getting a head start on pushing the limits of scale and creating their own discursive spaces. The Counter-Olympic Network has also decided to create the International Counter-Olympic Network (ICON) in hopes of strengthening a network of activists that continue to have a presence at every host city. Vancouver activists created an alternative torch, which was sent to activists in London and is now in safe keeping with those continuing the fight in Sochi. Thus the counter-Olympic torch relay continues, led by the activists that will continue to challenge and redefine the spatial boundaries that bind them together.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### **Sample Interview Questions for Research of London 2012 Activism**

1. How did you become involved in the organization that you are currently involved with?
2. Please provide a brief history of the organization, and how long the group or network has existed.
3. Approximately how many people are involved in the network and/or organization? How did the group mobilize and attract support?
4. What is the ultimate goal of the organization?
5. What have been some recent strategies that your organization has used to demonstrate against the Olympics and/or various Olympic-related issues?
6. How does the organization define the “success” of their campaign, and do you feel that it has been achieved?
7. Has your organization been involved in the Counter-Olympic Network? Or are you also affiliated with another counter-Olympic campaigns?
8. If so, do you feel that the network has been helpful in helping your organization’s efforts and general Olympic activism? Or do you think the network has provided potential for the various campaigns to lose focus?
9. Will the campaign and/or organization continue to demonstrate and/or lobby after the Olympic games have finished?
10. Do you feel that there are any important concepts/sentiments we haven’t discussed that you would like to share?







Appendix B:

| <b>Anti-Corporate Sponsor Groups</b>    |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <b>Organization/Activist Group Name</b> | <b>Mission</b>  | <b>Website</b>  |
| Bhopal Medical Appeal                   | A medical that raises money for medical clinics in Bhopal. Using the Olympics to challenge Dow Chemical for the travesties in Bhopal      | <a href="http://www.bhopal.org/">http://www.bhopal.org/</a>   |
| UK Tar Sands Network                    | Countering BP, another Olympic corporate sponsor  | <a href="http://www.no-tar-sands.org/">http://www.no-tar-sands.org/</a>   |
| London Mining Network                   | Protesting against Rio Tinto, the corporation providing athletes' medals  | <a href="http://londonminingnetwork.org/">http://londonminingnetwork.org/</a>   |
| Vietnam Friendship Society              | To create projects that raise awareness and funds for the Vietnamese people, especially those suffering from the effects of Agent Orange. | <a href="http://www.lenaldis.co.uk">http://www.lenaldis.co.uk</a>   |
| Greenwash Gold                          | An alliance between the BMA, UKTSN and LMN, aimed and raising awareness of Olympic greenwashing   | <a href="http://greenwashgold.org/">http://greenwashgold.org/</a>   |
| Drop Dow Now                            | Another main group advocating for Bhopal. In charge of the demonstration stunts, sine the BMA doesn't have the capacity to organize.      | <a href="http://dropdownow.org/">http://dropdownow.org/</a>   |
| United Steel Workers                    | Also countering Rio Tinto through its campaign, Off the Podium.   | <a href="http://www.offthepodium.org/tag/usw/">http://www.offthepodium.org/tag/usw/</a>   |
| Amnesty International                   | Amnesty International is involved in some of the campaigning for the anti-Dow campaign.   | <a href="http://www.bhopal.org/2012/06/don't-dow-it-action-with-amnesty-international/">http://www.bhopal.org/2012/06/don't-dow-it-action-with-amnesty-international/</a> |
| The Reclaim Shakespeare Company         | Using performing arts to counter the BP Olympic sponsorship.  | <a href="http://bp-or-not-bp.org/">http://bp-or-not-bp.org/</a>   |

Appendix B (Cont.)

| <b>Local Groups</b>  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <b>Organization/Activist Group Name</b>                      | <b>Mission</b>  | <b>Website</b>  |
| Black Activists Rising Against Cuts (BARAC)                  | Advocates for black communities in London and Greater London, with issues regarding jobs and public services. Also aims to highlight the disproportionate and adverse impact of reduction in public spending on black communities.  | <a href="http://blackactivistsrisingagainstcuts.blogspot.co.uk">http://blackactivistsrisingagainstcuts.blogspot.co.uk</a> |
| Carpenters Against the Regeneration Plan (CARP)              | A group of residents who live on the Carpenters Estate in Stratford East London, who are campaigning for against their gradual eviction.  | <a href="https://www.facebook.com/carpvoice">https://www.facebook.com/carpvoice</a>                                       |
| Counter Olympics Network (CON)                               | A network for all activist groups, facilitating communication between groups and supporting events and campaigns for all organizations  | <a href="http://counterolympicsnetwork.wordpress.com/">http://counterolympicsnetwork.wordpress.com/</a>                   |
| Lewisham Stop the War/Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) | Both groups aim to campaign against militarization of London. I listed both of these together because there seems to be an overlap of members in the campaign.  | <a href="http://www.cnduk.org">http://www.cnduk.org</a>   |
| No to G4S  | A group that has formed previous to G4S' role in Olympic security. G4S has been a private security company that has been hired for many projects in London, including London's prison system. They have been infamously known to create further problems and danger.                  | <a href="http://notog4s.blogspot.co.uk">http://notog4s.blogspot.co.uk</a>   |
| Save Greenwich Park (NOGOE)                                  | A campaign to stop the use of Greenwich Park as an Olympic venue for equestrian competitions  | <a href="http://www.nogoe2012.com">http://www.nogoe2012.com</a>   |
| Save Leyton Marsh  | Local East London residents who are protesting against the destruction of their borough, do to the construction of Olympic venues. Also using the Olympics as an opportunity to protest against city-related issues, such as education, the well-being of outer London boroughs, etc. | <a href="http://saveleytonmarsh.wordpress.com/">http://saveleytonmarsh.wordpress.com/</a>                                 |

