

# The London 2012 Olympics and Collective Memory

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Greetings  
from  
University of  
Greenwich,  
London, GB



# About University of Greenwich

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Over 100 years of excellence and access in  
higher education

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Began in 1890 as Thames Polytechnic

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Three campuses: Maritime Greenwich,  
Avery Hill (Eltham), and Medway

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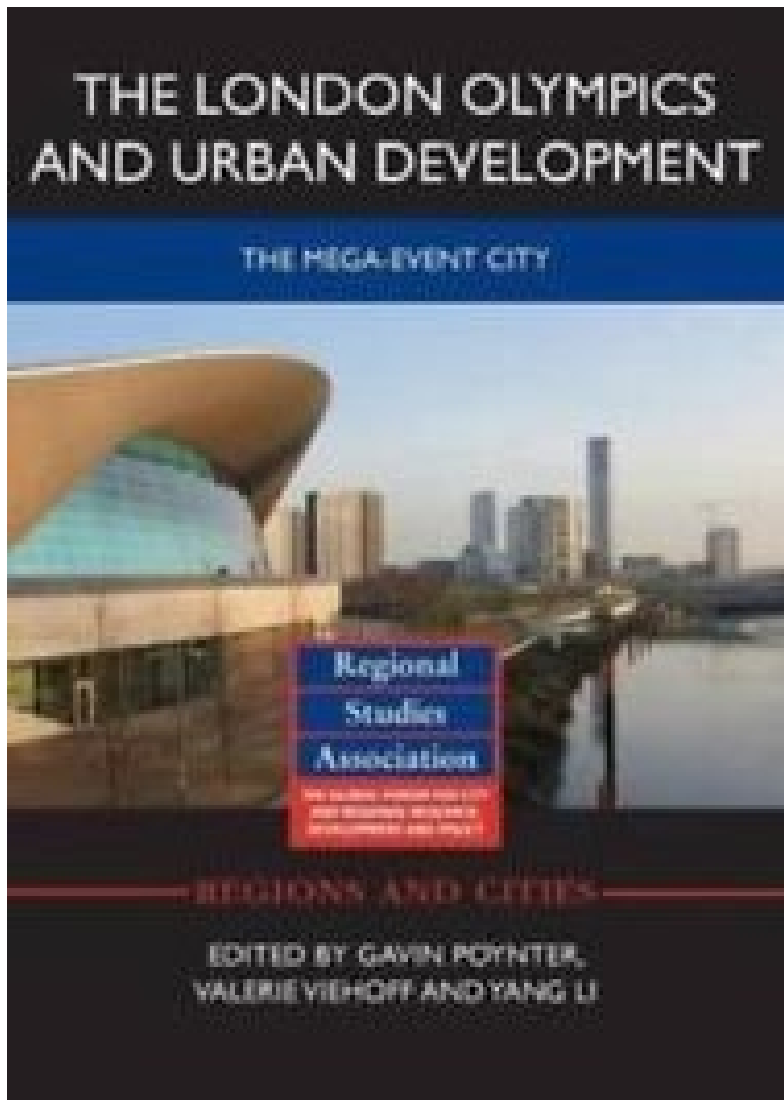
Over 27,000 students



# Why this study on remembering the London 2012 Olympic Games?

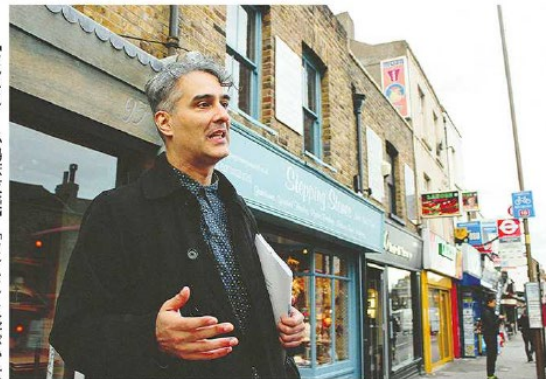


- I am intrigued on how little effort has been made to retain the memory of hosting the Games
- Nearly £9 billion spent on hosting the Olympics...what did we get in return?
- International sports organisations like FIFA and IOC have been criticised as ‘vultures’ who descend on host cities, make demands, take and take, and then leave...’
  - <https://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/1023008/pom-pous-ioc-demands-led-to-withdrawal-of-oslo-2022-olympic-bid>
  - (and cities around the world beg for the ‘privilege’ of hosting)
- What happened after the London 1908 and 1948 Olympic Games?



## ロンドン五輪 地域商業 恩恵薄く

【ロンドン＝小嶋麻友美】「ロンドンに学び、世界の都市を目指す」。二〇二二年夏季五輪が開かれたロンドンを十月末に視察した舩添要一東京都知事は、大会の成功をたたえたが、地域の商業は負の影響も受けている。研究者は「グローバルな視点だけでなく、地元目線の政策を忘れないで」と二〇年開催の東京五輪に提言する。



ロンドン南東部グリニッジで、「地元企業にきめ細かな支援を」と話すピーター・プラコス主任講師＝小嶋麻友美撮影

Hosting the Games was a “living laboratory” for research

Our location  
in the  
“Experience  
Economy”





# Presentation

- Overview: The London 2012 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games
- What is 'collective memory'?
- Methodology
- Findings: How are the London Olympics commemorated in public space?
- Implications
- Questions/Discussion





# Overview: The London 2012 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games



- Main Olympic Park in east London, plus multiple additional venues across six boroughs in London (and outside of London)
- Cost: a total of £8.77 billion (three times the original budget of £2.4 billion) (London Assembly, 05 Oct 2022)
- Legacy: residential housing (i.e. urban development) and encouraging sports:
  - *“Between 2012 and 2019, Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park underwent the physical transformation from Games-time focal point and home to various competition venues to a destination with brand-new parklands and playgrounds for local, regional, national and international visitors, two new business districts and work on five new housing neighbourhoods” (IOC, 02 Sept 2021)*

<https://olympics.com/en/olympic-games/london-2012>

<https://olympics.com/ioc/news/london-2012-engaging-inspiring-and-transforming>

<https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/london-assembly-press-releases/olympic-legacy-worth-cost>

# Why is remembering the Olympics important?

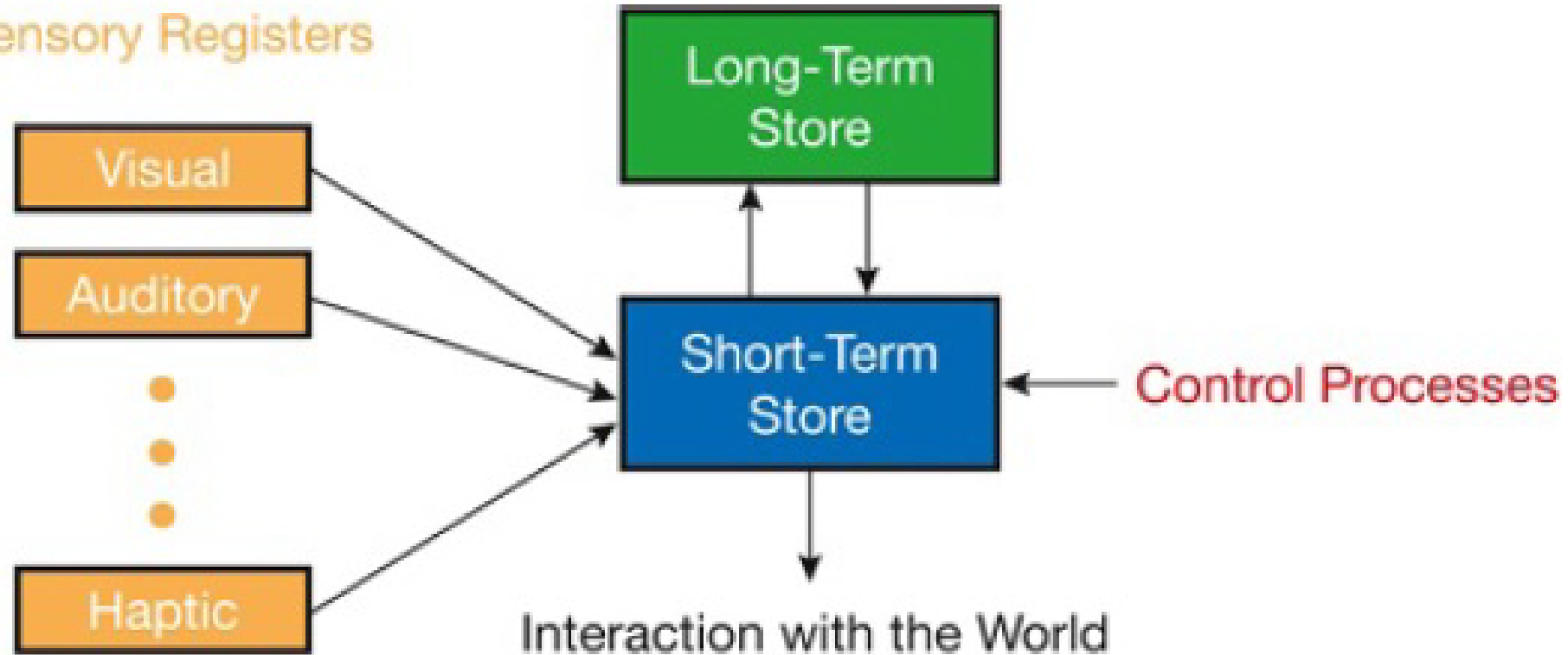
- National pride
- Local pride
- Citizenship and social cohesion
- Lasting social return on investment

# Human Memory

Radvansky, G. A.  
(2017). *Human memory*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.  
Routledge.

- Sensory and Short-Term Memory
- Working Memory
- Nondeclarative Memory
- Episodic Memory: Past and Future
- Forgetting
- Semantic Memory

## Sensory Registers



**FIGURE 1.2** *The Modal Model of Memory*

Adapted from: Atkinson, R. C., & Shiffrin, R. M. (1968). Human memory: A proposed system and its control processes. *The Psychology of Learning and Motivation*, 2, 8–195

# What is 'collective memory'?

Gedi and Elam (1996) on Halbwachs (1992)

*"real memory is a social reconstruction...dream-like images of private consciousness become transformed into the stable, rational, reconstructed conceptions of the social framework"*

# Even the stones carry memories

Halbwachs, M. (1925/1952/1992). *On collective memory*. University of Chicago press.

Tuan, Y. F. (1977). *Space and place: The perspective of experience*. U of Minnesota Press.



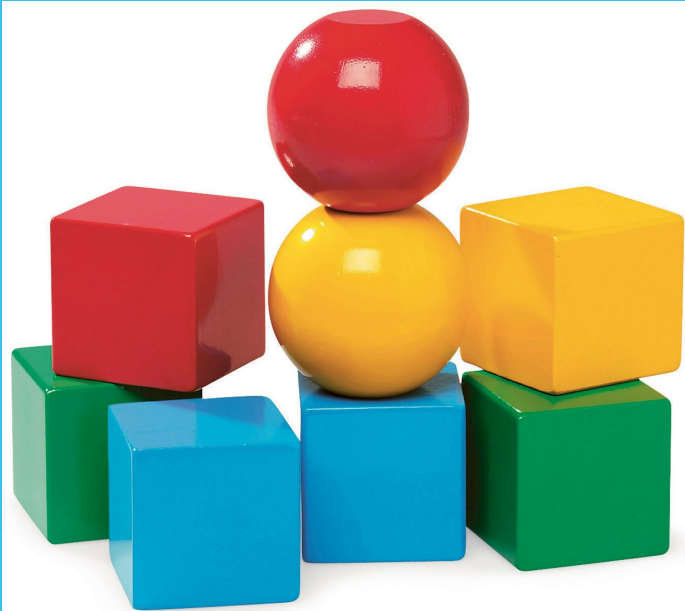
(Halbwachs, 1992)

"Thus we understand why **spatial images** play so important a role in the **collective memory**. The place a group occupies is not like a blackboard, where one may write and erase figures at will. No image of a blackboard can recall what was once written there. The board could not care less what has been written on it before, and new figures may be freely added.

**But place and group have each received the imprint of the other.** Therefore every phase of the group can be translated into spatial terms, and its residence is but the juncture of all these terms.

**Each aspect, each detail, of this place has a meaning intelligent only to members of the group, for each portion of its space corresponds to various and different aspects of the structure and life of their society, at least of what is most stable in it."**

# Relevance of “Collective Memory” concept



- Holocaust and World War II studies
- Post-soviet studies
- National tragedies and healing: Ukraine, Palestine/Israel, Hong Kong, Ireland, Cyprus, Sudan...
- Aboriginal/ethnic/racial mistreatment and reconciliation: South Africa, Australia, Canada
- *My aim, in part, is to reclaim the ‘collective memory’ concept and apply to not only in these negative and tragic contexts but also to more positive collective experiences i.e. Olympics*

# Limited previous research: e.g. Cashman, 1998

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ARTICLE

## *Olympic Legacy in an Olympic City: Monuments, Museums and Memory*

Richard Cashman  
University of New South Wales, Australia

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Almost every Olympic city, since the Games were revived in 1896, has some form of legacy whether it be in the form of buildings, monuments, art, galleries and museums, repositories and archives, stamps, souvenirs, memorabilia, plaques, and even street names. Then there are the local Olympic champions who are living reminders of a city's and country's Olympic experience. There are also oral memories and stories of the Games that are treasured by individual citizens. More mundane legacy includes debts (and occasional profits) for a city and its taxpayers. Most cities have some post-Games ceremonies to mark anniversaries of the Games, which are, in part, attempts to recapture some of the magic of the Olympic moment and to place the Olympics in the history of the city. All of the above forms of legacy demonstrate that a particular city has a unique status - that of an Olympic city. It is one of only 21 cities on four continents that have earned the right to stage the Summer Games, or one of 17 other cities that have staged the Winter Games. There is also an elite group, which have earned the right to stage the Games twice: Athens, London, Los Angeles and Paris (Summer Games), and Innsbruck, Lake Placid and St Moritz (Winter Games).



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# Methodology

Visual ethnography  
field research

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graph TD; A[Visual ethnography field research] --> B[Snowball technique: interviewing]; B --> C[Secondary research, news, media, archives];
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Snowball technique:  
interviewing

Secondary research,  
news, media, archives

# Findings: How are the London 2012 Olympics commemorated in public (and private) space?



# The stadium as iconic reminder

e.g. Helsinki (1952), Tokyo (1964), Montreal (1976)

An aerial night-time photograph of the London Stadium, a large, circular, open-air stadium with a distinctive white steel lattice structure. The stadium is filled with spectators, and the interior is brightly lit. The exterior of the stadium is illuminated with vibrant, multi-colored lights, creating a glowing effect. The surrounding area is dark, with some city buildings visible in the background. The text "London Stadium" in "Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park" (Stratford, E20) is overlaid in white on the image.

“London Stadium” in “Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park”  
(Stratford, E20)











# Remembering resistance to London 2012 Olympics



# Tenth Anniversary commemorative event

- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-61757894>



The image is a screenshot of a BBC News article. At the top, the BBC logo is visible on the left, and navigation links for 'Sign in', 'Home', 'News', 'Sport', 'Weather', 'iPlayer', and 'Sounds' are on the right. Below the navigation is a red banner with the word 'NEWS' in white. Underneath the banner is a horizontal menu with links for 'Home', 'InDepth', 'Israel-Gaza war', 'Cost of Living', 'War in Ukraine', 'Climate', 'UK', 'World', 'Business', and 'Politics'. The main content area shows the article title 'London 2012 anniversary: Olympic Park to host celebrations' in a large, bold, black serif font. Below the title is the date '© 10 June 2022' and a red share icon. The main image is a night-time photograph of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in London, featuring a large stadium and surrounding buildings illuminated with lights, with a massive display of fireworks exploding in the dark sky above. Below the image is a caption: '| Team GB won 185 medals at the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic games'. At the bottom of the article, there is a short paragraph: 'The Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park is to host two weeks of events to celebrate 10 years since the London 2012 games.'

# Erasing the memory



# Preliminary Analysis

- Private sector more inclined to commemorate symbolically
  - why? – serving local markets; show off corporate social responsibility; status
- Olympic “legacy” = real estate development, not social identity
- Concurrently, historic Greenwich was rebranded from “heritage site” to “visitor attraction” = commercialisation

## Next steps in the research

- Catalogue of London 2012 Olympics markers and monuments
- Valuation of souvenirs and memorabilia (e.g. eBay; auctions)
- Interviews/oral histories with local residents, volunteers, athletes to create a wider picture of the ‘collective memory’”



Memorabilia

Souvenirs

Personal Mementos

# Discussion / Questions



Thank you.

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