BOOK REVIEW


From the evolutionary changes seen in city event strategies, to the anticipated direction of post-industrial cites and the role of infrastructure and appropriate urban development strategies, Smith covers a complex series of relevant topics, inviting the reader to understand how urban regeneration is delivered within major event contexts. Starting with a comprehensive theoretical platform of economic, political and social perspectives, Smith delves deeper in to the practical side of delivering such projects. He explores the catalytic properties of events for fuelling new urban projects, and their extraordinary nature to fast track existing priorities commenting on their power to influence wider city development and regeneration. Later on in Chapter 9, Smith provides a useful insight in to how such events are project managed. He analyses particular aspects of urban governance, exposing the often competing, conflicting nature of decisions made at a project management level, and the difficulties this poses for those delivering event regeneration.  Balancing the needs of multiple stakeholder groups (e.g. local stakeholders, private and public organisations) in order to execute a ‘successful event’, and as of recent years delivering longer-term ‘legacy’ outputs, clearly appears to be a tough feat according to Smith’s analysis.

A critical synthesis of key literatures, in-depth international case studies, visual aids and pockets of primary sources of data are used to justify arguments and provide recommendations for future urban policy and practice. One of the key strengths of the book is the match between detailed analysis of topics and the ‘global approach’ to major event analysis that allows Smith to provide a well-informed, qualitatively robust account of causalties between event policies and subsequent impacts for cities. Complete with a series of in-text, and end-of-chapter extended case studies, this is where the book comes in to its own. At the time of writing, there is no other book that has achieved such depth. Smith’s methodical approach to the writing and structuring of this book provides an exemplary learning experience. Concepts are clearly defined, applied to practice, balanced with some critical theory and illustrated within case study perspectives, providing the authority for judgements made. Throughout, Smith provides a series of well-balanced arguments presenting both favourable and critical opinions. There are however some specific noteworthy criticisms that emerge as core themes throughout his writing.

With regards to such critical perspectives, it is the experiences of local community stakeholders in particular that resonate throughout the author’s work. Although not explicitly, Smith explores the notion of local casualties – often a product of a neo-liberal regime of privatisation and commercialisation etc, suggesting that urban city environments operate within a bourgeois playground for the elites, at the expense of community disadvantage. Obviously elites are not quite the declared beneficiaries of major events and subsequent economic development if we were to look at event-bid rhetoric, but as Smith explores, this is often the potential futures for a gentrified urban landscape. This is a common observation within major event settings, but is gentrification for good or bad? Who exactly receives a slice of the Olympic pie? Smith for example highlights the importance of estate price rises, for more property-led event funding to combat spiralling (often public) spending; however short-term impacts can often lead to the displacement of local communities and economically vulnerable groups (residential and business). These are the (many) types of contradictions that Smith
explores (pages 256 – 259). Throughout the book, the author explores such controversies associated with hosting events, particularly ‘global vs local’ (and macro Vs micro) perspectives, ideologies that continue to spark commentator scepticism- even as we move in to an epoch supposedly characterised by ‘softer’ social and ‘people-focused’ regeneration (and longer-term legacy outcomes), rather than one characterised by the ‘harder’, economic (cost-benefit) based ambitions. Despite such rhetoric, contemporary authors continue to introduce the critical metaphor of Bakhtin’s ‘carnival mask’ to theoretically explore events as a sinister phenomenon of superficial regeneration (Harvey, 1989), that provides a ‘smokescreen’ (page 32) for inherent urban problems, rather than directly tackling them. As Smith and many authors critically postulate, such ‘softer’ outcomes desired by event organisers for particular communities, may just be a fig leaf to justify major expenditures, as cities realise the impossibility of economic returns on investment.

Smith explores how the pressure of globalisation, and increasing severity of city competition for inward investment may be the focus for cities in the 21st century- a catalyst used to market and promote a city to attract e.g inward investment, a shift from ‘managerialism’ to ‘entrepreneurialism’ (Harvey, 1989) and a focus on the ‘entrepreneurial city’. Does this symbolise a shift towards a late / post-modernist paradigm? Smith argues again the contextual nature of this debate, exploring how South Africa, for example, are still seeking major events as a modernisation project to stimulate industrialisation, whereas Western societies and more developed (post-industrial) nations can be seen as entering a period of late / post-modernity. Smith however concludes that major events continue to be seen through a modern lens for progressive means, with postmodern tendencies in specific instances.

Early on in Smith’s work (chapter 2), readers are treated with a much-needed theoretical platform to understand event regeneration at a deeper level, helping to explore why event projects are pursued, who they are meant to benefit and why they may / may not work, the complex processes that deliver them and explain why sceptics exist. Such theoretical, critical perspectives provide a much required injection to 1) a book that is very practice focussed, and 2) a field of inquiry systematically lacking in theoretical underpinning. Pages eighteen to forty in particular move away from the ‘nitty gritty’ of project complexity, to explore more sociological, cultural, political and economic dimensions of event delivery. Although a much needed theoretical dose, the author could have more closely bridged what appears to be a significant gap between theoretical explanations and practical considerations throughout. Instead, theoretical perspectives remained relatively divorced and fragmented from case studies and the analysis of practice, where I was left at times thinking e.g. “is Smith trying to reflect a view of neo-liberalism here?”.. “Are these policies of state control, consolidating Smith’s critical ‘Ventilsitten steam valve’ theory”? Even if Smith meant for such theoretical criticisms to be implicit in practice provided, I believe a more direct application would have provided a clearer heuristic.

Smith’s work is genuinely a must have for those examining the relationship between events and urban regeneration and/or interested in the ecology of cities amidst a complex storm of ambitious political, commercial, economic and social event-related policies. Within known historical and contemporary urban arenas of contextual complexity, contradictions and competing stakeholder interests, the level of detail presented by the author throughout, provides an exceptional level of analysis - a must-read for students and practitioners alike.

References
Smith, A (2012), *Events and Urban Regeneration; the Strategic Use of Events to Revitalise Cities*, Routledge, London


Michael B Duignan
Anglia Ruskin University,
Michael.Duignan@anglia.ac.uk
www.OlympicResearcher.wordpress.com
(c) 2013, Michael Duignan