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**Identidade Britânica e a campanha de Londres
para a Olimpíada 2012**

**British Identity and London's Campaign to host
the 2012 Olympics**



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This work is dedicated to the memory of my niece, talented young Mariana, who was finishing her own thesis and then suddenly departed this life.

“People do not die for us immediately, but remain bathed in a sort of aura of life which bears no relation to true immortality but through which they continue to occupy our thoughts in the same way as when they were alive. It is as though they were traveling abroad.” Marcel Proust

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Palavras-chave

Identidade, iconicidade, cerimónia de encerramento, jogos olímpicos, Jogos Olímpicos de Londres, Londres 2012, Beijing 2008, promoção, desporto, media, nacionalidade, *Londonness*, *Britishness*, Campanha Olímpica, diversidade, marketing.

Resumo

O presente trabalho propõe-se analisar a campanha Britânica para acolher os Jogos Olímpicos de 2012 bem como a *Apresentação de Londres 2012* na Cerimónia de Encerramento dos Jogos Olímpicos de Beijing, em 2008. Será abordada a complexidade dos ícones apresentados, bem como os motivos que estiveram na base desta opção. A *Apresentação de Londres 2012* centra-se, claramente, em ícones que, mais do que a Grã-Bretanha, identificam a cidade de Londres ao longo de oito minutos assemelhando-se a um anúncio publicitário. Assim sendo, *Londonness* e *Britishness* serão explorados como dois conceitos possivelmente diferentes.

Às questões teóricas relacionadas com a identidade seguir-se-á um capítulo dedicado à contextualização histórica dos dois momentos em que Londres recebeu os Jogos Olímpicos – 1908 e 1948. Face aos ideais dos Jogos Olímpicos da era moderna e às estratégias de marketing que a *Apresentação de Londres 2012* sugere, apresentam-se os presumíveis argumentos que persuadiram o Comité Olímpico a eleger a cidade de Londres em detrimento das rivais Paris, Madrid, Nova York e Moscovo. O conjunto de ícones utilizados nesta apresentação será discutido na pluralidade de significados que sugerem.

Finalmente, questionam-se as significativas estratégias utilizadas e que indiciam que os Jogos Olímpicos são um mega-evento politizado, como tantos outros, com características que apelam a uma população global e massificada. Acentuar *Londonness* em detrimento de *Britishness* poderá, assim, ter sido uma estratégia de marketing mais eficaz, uma vez que Londres, ao contrário da Grã-Bretanha, é mais facilmente identificável por ser uma *cidade do mundo*. A astuciosa campanha e a *Apresentação de Londres 2012* foram inteiramente concebidas para consumo externo.

Keywords

Identity, iconicity, Olympics, closing ceremony, London Olympics, London 2012, Beijing 2008, promotion, sport, media, nationality, *Londonness*, *Britishness*, Olympic Campaign, diversity, marketing.

Abstract

This thesis aims to analyse the British campaign to host the 2012 Olympics and the *London 2012 Presentation* during the Closing Ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics. It will look at the complexity of the iconic images used, as well as the reasons for the choice of these over others. This presentation clearly focuses on symbols that, rather than Britain, identify London in an eight-minute presentation resembling an advertisement. Hence, *Londonness* and *Britishness* will be explored as two possibly distinctive concepts.

Theoretical questions relating to identity will be followed by a chapter briefly covering the historical background of the 1908 and 1948 London Olympics. Considering the ideals upon which the modern Olympic Games are based and the marketing strategies the *London 2012 Presentation* seems to have used, I will attempt to present the probable reasons that led the Olympic Committee to choose the London bid over its rivals: Paris, Madrid, New York and Moscow. I will also discuss the set of icons used in the presentation for the range of significations they suggest.

Finally, I will question the meaningfulness of the Olympic Games as a highly politicized mega-sporting event that, like so many others, is aimed at channels of global mass consumption. Stressing *Londonness* over *Britishness* would then seem to have suggested a more effective marketing strategy, for London as opposed to Britain, could more plausibly offer itself as a place belonging to the world. The skill of the campaign and the *London 2012 Presentation* was that it was wholly made for external consumption.

**British Identity and London's Campaign to host the 2012
Olympics**

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Introduction

One man practicing sportsmanship is far better than fifty preaching it. Knute Rockne (1888 - 1931)

When I first saw the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of the 2008 Beijing Olympics in August 2008, the magnificence and beauty of the Chinese performances held my attention for almost the entire Ceremony. The gigantic proportions of the *Bird's Nest*, the enthusiasm of the audience and of the TV reporters, the profusion of light and colour together with the perfect performances of actors, dancers and acrobats struck and impressed me. Moreover, if on stage they showed such developed skills, as the Games went on even more skilled competitors and performers appeared, even more organisational ability was on show.¹ By the end of the 29th Olympiad in Beijing, I fully realized how important and wealthy China is, and how hard it tried to convey a sense of happiness, power, strength and *modernity*, by means of effective and comprehensive media coverage. While watching the Closing Ceremony and China's deployment of unimaginable human resources, my curiosity was aroused regarding the Handover Ceremony and the London 2012 Presentation.

My aim in analysing the London 2012 Presentation in the Closing Ceremony at 2008 Beijing Olympics is to highlight the way the British chose to portray themselves in such a prominent *mega* sporting event broadcast around the world by isolating the current icons and identity signs they used in this ceremony. In doing so, I will try to underscore that, in cultural and sporting terms, the British want to exhibit an image based on *old values* combined with more modern ideas and concepts. Despite the doubts Britain had (and has) regarding its own identity as a nation in the post-imperial, post-war and global world, Britain still seeks a leading role in Europe (and in the world). But on closer examination, Britain's campaign to host the 2012 London Olympics shows that the British made use of

¹ China won 51 Gold, 21 Silver and 28 Bronze medals in a total number of 100 medals only surpassed by the USA (110 total medals). While Britain won a total of 47 medals.
Source: <http://www.olympic.org/en/content/All-Olympic-results-since1896/>

all their *weapons* and influences in order to win the bid, and that *old values* such as respect for the rules or fair play are ancient history when a great media and commercial event such as the Olympics is at stake.

Although the London 2012 Presentation in Beijing looked like a minor show, on a closer analysis it performed three major functions: 1) it provided a series of selected images which attempt to project contemporary Britain; 2) it promoted tourism to Britain; 3) it offered a striking contrast between two extremely different *cultures* – those of China and Britain. It is my opinion that the London 2012 Presentation in Beijing was meant to assert British diversity and showcase cultural attractions (especially in London), as well as to highlight the wide discrepancy between how the Chinese and British nations project themselves. Such a simple and *unsophisticated* performance demonstrated curiously enough how much sportsmanship, internationalism, creativity, integration and humanism are values also upheld by the mentor of the modern era Olympic Games, Baron De Coubertin. Deep and wide-ranging, De Coubertin's ideals include some fundamental principles such as these listed below:

The important thing in life is not the victory but the battle, the essential is not to have won but to have fought well;

Effort is the supreme joy. Success is not an end but a means to aim higher.

The individual has no value except within the context of humanity;

*citius, altius, fortius.*²;

Let us pursue our reforms and seek to carry out the programme contained in these words – *Sport and Liberty*;

Open the doors of the temple [...] the future of humanity demands it.

All types of sport for everyone (Durry, 1996: 9-11).³

Sport is not the focus of this thesis, nor is it my intention to speak in detail of British Identity. The subject matter is what the British campaign to get the 2012 Olympics, and specifically the London 2012 Presentation in Beijing, tells us about the state of British self-image/identity. Given that the matrix of identity consists of

² Father Didon's motto: "Citius, fortius, altius", which later became the Olympic motto.

³ Source: <http://www.coubertin.ch/pdf/MEP%20Angl.%20Cou%202%20%2B%208p.%20%2B%206%20.pdf>

three main fields: what we think about ourselves (our self-image), what we do and how we understand our actions (our conduct and values), what others think of us (external perceptions of us), one way to consider the London 2012 Presentation in Beijing is to conclude that it was wholly made for external consumption. Moreover, due to its short duration (eight minutes), the British had to select a set of images essentially intended to *advertise*, especially their capital city (Storry & Childs, 1997: 5-7). However, as a worldwide-televised show, the creative processes involved and the production of the London 2012 Presentation in Beijing did not fail to involve its creators in an active reflection on what the country's contemporary emblems, icons and identity signs might be.⁴ As argued by Berkaak, an Olympic event "allows us to see from the inside and the outside. It provides us with an opportunity to see ourselves with the eyes of strangers. We can discover our blind spots, our way of life and culture. ...The sooner we start on this introspective task the sooner we will be able to choose which aspects we want to emulate, which we want to change, and which we want to retain as they are" (Berkaak cited by Garcia, 2008: 362).

In this context, sports and cultural representations will function as a backdrop to wider social change, to help illustrate my point of view. Therefore, a survey of ideas about Britishness and Identity, and a brief historical background to the last two Olympic Games held in London (1908 and 1948) will precede a cautious analysis of the campaign to host the 2012 London Olympic Games. In my opinion, the Olympic Movement and the IOC, being such politicized organizations, will need a historical framework in order to clarify the reason why and how London got to be the first city to host the Olympics for the third time. Finally, the icons and identity signs displayed during the London 2012 Handover Ceremony at the Beijing Olympics 2008 will be listed and carefully considered as images *sculpted* to represent contemporary Britain, and most particularly London.

The 2008 Opening and Closing Ceremonies in Beijing, in particular, showed the world outstanding Chinese performances, their technological progress and their newly-acquired and unbeatable wealth. They also revealed their high

4 Press articles and information about the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games (LOCOG)'s introspective action can be found at <<http://www.london2012.com/>>.

organizational skills as well as their rigidity in terms of performance. The Official Website of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games stated that “during Games-time, 100,000 volunteers will provide direct services for the Olympic and Paralympic Games at more than 30,000 positions. An additional 400,000 city volunteers have been recruited to provide information consultation, language interpretation and emergency aid services at 550 posts throughout Beijing and around Olympic venues.”⁵ An impressive number of spectators were also attracted: three billion viewers worldwide and around ninety-one thousand people attended the Opening Ceremony, according to IOC’s President Jacques Rogge. Viewers around the world, as well as spectators in the *Bird’s Nest*, witnessed a celebration of China’s old history. Old Chinese inventions such as the compass and paper were shown through a long and extravagant demonstration in which modern China was almost forgotten. Apart from the technology used throughout the Ceremonies to make their ancient achievements manifest and the presence of two astronauts, modern China was practically hidden from view.

The Closing Ceremony of the Beijing Olympics on 24th August 2008 has drawn worldwide attention and Beijing’s successful and impressive hosting and organization of the Games has earned global applause. China’s Olympic slogan *One World, One Dream* turned out to be a success despite predictions of gloom and doom, including rumours of terrorists’ plots, complaints of air pollution and problems with Tibet ahead of the competition. China was really living an auspicious year,⁶ as about eighty world leaders were present on 8 August at the 2008 Games ignoring “calls to boycott the Games over China’s treatment of Tibetans” as well as strong controversies about “China’s Human Rights and media freedom”⁷(Bristow, 2008). For some, however, the ceremonies referred to above were rather disturbing for their discipline and thousands of *coerced* volunteers, which attracted comparison with those of the 1936 Berlin Games. At the beginning of the 21st century, China continues to live under a communist dictatorship where

5 Source:<http://en.beijing2008.cn/volunteers/news/latest/n214456879.shtml>

6 The Chinese believe number eight brings them luck.(Ang, 1997: 223)

7 Source : <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7550283.stm>

the individual vanishes in favour of the community. Because, and in spite of that, few countries can compete with its unbeatable working force and economy.

On the surface, the London 2012 Presentation in Beijing (or the Handover Segment), when compared to the efforts of these Chinese hosts during the ceremony, resembled an *amateur theatre workshop*. Everything looked extremely *déjà vu*. As a starting point for the London 2012 Presentation in Beijing, a series of visual clichés were paraded with a “short animated title sequence”⁸ presenting images on a television screen showing a *veritable* mix of old and modern London. Well-known icons such as Big Ben and British Royal Guards, among others, were displayed together with underground maps and representations of Punks. In Beijing’s *Bird’s Nest* a multiracial, multicultural and multi-aged group of people including the disabled in wheel-chairs performed a joyful and *disorganized-seeming* show carrying *brollies* and newspapers. Unexpectedly, a modern red double-decker bus reminding the archetypal piece of London public transport, the Routemaster bus, arrived on the scene. Three bikers rode right past the bus as if it were stuck in traffic just before the bus stop. A Chinese child then handed over a ball to a British child, as if it were the Handover between young generations, and thus guarantees the future of the Olympic Games.⁹

Finally, the modern red double-decker bus opens up to stage a green platform on which, different British generations appear. Jimmy Page, the legendary Led Zeppelin rock group guitarist, joins Leona Lewis, a new international urban pop singer in a real, live presentation. The Chinese unaffectedly replaced singer Yang Peiyi for not being “cute enough” by Lin Miaoke demonstrating that the overall effect is more important than the individual. According to *The Telegraph*, Yang Peiyi was chosen as the best voice “but was unsuited to the lead role because of her buck teeth.” The journalist Richard Spencer (2008) wrote that in a radio interview Mr Chen, the show’s musical designer, was fully convinced that they had made the right choice: “I think it is fair to both Lin Miaoke and Yang Peiyi - after all, we have a perfect voice, a perfect image and a perfect show, in our team’s view, all together.” Therefore, the

⁸ Source: http://www.london2012.com_documents_locog-publications_olympic-ho-guide-web.pdf

⁹ cf. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yz47ZQIBwmQ>

obsession of the Chinese Communist leaders with giving the world a perfect image of their country ended up becoming a publicity *faux pas* because of being caught ignoring *authenticity* and individual values in favour of projecting an attractive but markedly less *authentic* vision of China. Inside the Bird's Nest, all the so-called birds had to fly with the greatest precision, even if they sometimes only had to pretend to fly out of respect for the common interest of the flock.



Yang Peiyi (1)



Lin Miaoke (2)

Britain, adopting an alternative social model, espoused a defective *warts-and-all* eclectic self-image. The exception is David Beckham, a global football hero, who emerges from the green London Olympics Village kicking a football out into the audience.

In spite of the apparent simplicity and minimalism of the display, a show of diversity, creativity, enthusiasm, integration and multiculturalism was offered showing signs of concern for the environment and a strong preoccupation with inclusiveness, civility, team spirit, kindness, mutual respect and understanding – that is to say, an updated version of *British fair-play*. However, one has to be aware of two central ideas: that one of the main purposes of the London 2012 Presentation is to advertise the future Olympic host city, and that there are plenty of inconsistencies/contradictions in the show, as well as in the way the British continue to see themselves.

Besides showing that London remains the *coolest place on earth* but that the British continue to behave as *gentlemen*, the London 2012 Presentation in the Closing Ceremony in 2008 Beijing Olympics seems to take us back and closer to the Olympic ideal



Design Handover Ceremony London 2012 (3)

of Baron de Coubertin towards which, the claim was implicitly made, the British have from the beginning contributed considerably (Durry, 1996:79).

In a historical analysis of the Olympic Games, Richard Tames argues that the “revival of the Olympic Games was not a British initiative but it was inspired by admiration for the British cult, not of sport, but of *sportsmanship*” (Tames, 2007:3). In fact, Joachim K. Rühl and Anette Keuser write that “scholars have more or less neglected all (...) national revivals of the Olympic Games which led up to the successful international revival in Athens 1896” (Rühl & Keuser, 1997: 55). They add that the first modern Olympics in 1896 had been largely influenced by the renowned Liverpool Olympics Program. More important however, is Rühl and Keuser’s claim that “England has been one of the cradles of modern Olympism, if we confine its first developmental stages to ‘Olympian’ or ‘Olympic’ games ranging from local up to national level” (ibid: 55).

Julian Norridge writes that much of the Modern Games is due to the philanthropic doctor, William Penny Brookes, whom Juan Antonio Samaranch (President of the International Olympic Committee, 1980 – 2001) once referred to as the real “founder of the modern Olympic Games” (Norridge, 2008: 337). Brookes’ concept of the Games firmly embraced the idea of classlessness and amateurism, when he dreamt of and fought for a revival of the Olympic Games, specifically by countless approaches to the Greek King, the Prime Minister and the Greek Ambassador in London. It seems that Brookes also impressed Baron de

Coubertin for, after a visit to Much Wenlock (or the Wenlock Olympics), De Coubertin paid tribute to Brookes when he wrote:

if the Olympic Games that modern Greece has not yet been able to revive still survive today, it is due not to a Greek, but to Dr W P Brookes. It is he who inaugurated them 40 years ago and it is he, now 82 years of age but still alert and vigorous, who continues to organize and inspire them (ibid: 340).

By 1865, Brookes created the National Olympian Association, in collaboration with Charles Melly and John Hulley from Liverpool (ibid: 338-9). In 1867, in the so-called "sixth annual Olympic Festival of the Athletic Society of Great Britain" John Hulley introduced one of the most seminal motives for the Modern Olympic Games: 'What I desire to impress upon you is that Olympian festivals are not the end of physical education. Physical education, or rather its dissemination, is the end. Olympic festivals are the means of securing that end.'" (Rühl & Keuser, 1997: 59) In addition, Hulley's innovative ideas included women, too: "There was a very large number of visitors, and the ladies – when will they have their Olympic Festivals? - mustered in strong force" (ibid: 59).

Another but no less important contributor to the establishment of the Modern Olympics was a "romantic imperialist" named John Astley Cooper. According to Katharine Moore, when Baron Pierre De Coubertin suggested reviving the Olympic Games he met with little enthusiasm from the British. At the time, the British were advocating a Pan-Britannic Festival inspired by Cooper, whose purpose was to "glorify the might and power of the British Empire" and to join the people of the Empire "every four years as a means of increasing the goodwill and good understanding of the Empire" (Moore, 1997: 71-91). This Pan-Britannic Festival is understood as the embryo of the Commonwealth Games, though the first Commonwealth Games were held only in 1930 in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. At the Commonwealth Games, there are separate teams for England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. Presently, they are known as the *Friendly Games* because many of the athletes share the same language, in principle all come from the *Commonwealth family* and inclusion is a fundamental aspect of the games (Leyshon, 1997: 205-214). This might be considered an over-sanitised view: there is currently not much friendliness between Zimbabwe and a

number of other Commonwealth countries. On the other hand, Cooper's desire to "celebrate the industrial, cultural, and athletic prowess of the Anglo-Saxon race could eventually be reconciled with Coubertin proposal of 'a multi nation athletic festival'" (Moore, 1997:71).

In the twenty-first century, the Olympic Games are a major sporting and cultural event that can engage and unite entire nations. In fact, the Games are still one of the few occasions when the people of the United Kingdom join and participate as a single nation. Therefore, and given that the Olympic Opening and Closing Ceremonies have promoted increasing interest in the Olympic Movement worldwide, as well as attracted global media coverage, I found it challenging to address the London 2012 Presentation in the Closing Ceremony at the Beijing Olympics 2008 as a cultural phenomenon. So, to carry out this case study, it was necessary to cut across disciplines and enter research fields which I am not totally familiar with, such as marketing, social sciences and sports. However, the strong contrast between the British and Chinese performances on 24 August 2008, in which the former's presentation seemed unduly modest, even pathetic, in comparison with the fabulous achievements of the latter, arrested my attention. Why would anyone award the Games to these apparent *artisans*? Who are the British? How are we expected to recognise and value them? Trying to answer these questions will make up my study.

Chapter I

Britishness and Identity

1.1. Theorising Identity

One of the most daunting tasks of human kind is to get to know who we are. The immediate question confronting research students of British identity is how many identities are there to be studied? And once identified, how can they be examined satisfactorily? Furthermore, how can such a significant, controversial, eclectic and historic nation *as old as the hills* as the phrase is, be characterized when its own people are still so confused by and uncertain about the problematic identity of contemporary Britain?

There was a time in the nineteenth century when the British poet Coleridge brought up the question of national identity, a time when “Language, religion, laws, government, blood” seemed to constitute its main defining features (Coleridge, 1835: 108). Nation referred to a community of people united by the same language and religion, whose government was legitimated by lineage or heritage. Worthy of note, indeed, was the notion of territory itself, as in the age of Empire, geographic borders did not act as the major basis for constructing *national identity*. In this sense, nationality was not simply about living or sharing the same soil, nor did this alone make people feel a sense of belonging to a country.

Currently, the question of national identity has become, indeed, an immensely complex issue given the present cultural context of globalization. As emphasized by Gillian Moreira in “*When Icebergs Melt... A Look at European Identity Today*”:

‘In an increasingly globalised and interdependent world, physical borders between countries are weakened and contact between peoples is intensified. The resulting meeting and mixing of cultures brings into question an understanding of individual and collective identities as based on singular, homogenising notions of nation, culture, language, faith, and calls for the development of plural and shared understanding of self and other...at least in theory.’ (Moreira, 2008: 109)

In spite of this “homogenising” tendency, individuals are still referred to (functionally) as “the Chinese”, “the French”, “the German” or “the British”, as they are still recognised as belonging to diverse nations, share different cultural traditions and values, identify themselves with their *homeland*, recognise and frequently adopt the symbols of their countries/nations. Michael Pickering reminds us that “We still think in terms of nations, of ‘our’ own individual nation as opposed to others. We divide ourselves as citizens belonging to ‘our’ nation from foreigners who do not belong” (Pickering, 2001: 105).

National identity, as defined by Pickering, “does not preclude other forms of identity, rather it is an overarching sense of identity that subsumes, where it can, other, more particularistic, identities” (ibid: 88). According to Miller, national identity is in significant measure defined as a set of features that bring together isolated identities/a group of people /an ethnic group, who share the same language, the same kind of cultural and sometimes religious beliefs, observe the same socio-political rules, and are geographically delimited. Moreover, national identity is the product of historical experience (Miller, 1995:19-27) and is “constructed out of selective elements which are historically inherited” (Pickering, 2001: 103). Allan Megill adds that, “collective identities are also *formed*, as a result of deliberate effort, most obviously as a result of teaching carried out in schools” (Megill, 2008: 30-1). Therefore, education functions as one of the most important means of *shaping* a country or a nation. In contrast, Allan Megill adds that, the formation of the national identity functions in “a *quasi-natural*” way; “people take it in in a largely non-reflective, unintentional way, as the by-product of living of their lives.” Consequently, it “exists on a continuum between the unintentional and the intentional” (ibid: 30-1).

National identity includes an important psychological factor as well: affectivity. Affection has the power to bring people of a group together whether for political, cultural, geographic, religious or even sporting reasons and this sentiment greatly explains the behaviour (perhaps exaggerated in this citation) of

flag-waving and flag-burning in political demonstrations, or ground-kissing rituals on return to a homeland. For example, in 1945 George Orwell contrasted extreme nationalists – “each of them simply an enormous mouth bellowing the same lie over and over again”- with the nationalism that is “part

of the make-up of most of us, whether we like it or not". This can turn people in a moment from fair-mindedness to vicious partisanship: "One prod to the nerve of nationalism and the intellectual decencies can vanish, the past can be altered, and the plainest facts can be denied" (Pickering, 2001: 103).

But nationalism should not be confounded with national identity since nationalism reflects the ideologies of nationalist movements whose main objectives are to achieve political and cultural independence in such a way that broadens the gap between peoples instead of uniting them. Following the ideas of Michael Ignatieff "As a moral ideal, nationalism is an ethic of heroic sacrifice, justifying the use of violence in the defense of one's nation against enemies, internal or external" (Ignatieff, 1995: 5). Take the example of nationalisms in Spain in the age of Franco or the current persistence of ETA or in Italy, with the emergence of various fair-right groups, which have to be taken into account when analysing the construction of a more or less united Europe. Ignatieff characterizes the "civic nation" (a notion which originated in Great Britain, France, and the United States) as a "community of equal rights-bearing citizens, united in patriotic attachment to a shared set of political practices and values." Following this view, Ignatieff defends the idea that today we are only living in a cosmopolitan society thanks to "civic nationalism" (ibid: 6).

In the 21st century, in the era of globalization, of a wider European Union and of constant immigrant flows, to suggest that there is such a thing as a "specific national identity" requires special attention and it has to be regarded with suspicion. Take the case of national football teams, whose members are increasingly from different cultural ethnic groups and increasingly tend to be open to talented individuals who have switched their nationality to gain admittance to teams currently less gifted with good players born within their territories. Nationality is therefore something people have learned to shift and finesse according to individual interests. As Storry and Childs have put it:

Nationality is a matter of allegiance and cultural affiliation. Some people say that our nationality is indicated by where you choose to live or by the team you support at sport events; others say that it is a question of whom you would fight for. It has also been argued that nationality is no longer a

powerful force in Britain, that it is simply a matter of circumstance, and that today it is far less significant than local or global identities: relatives, friends and communities are more important to us and so is transnational culture, such that notions of national identity are both less persuasive and more contentious than they used to be. Above all, nationality is a question of identity and so is crossed by other kinds of identity, such as ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, age and occupation (Storry & Childs, 1997:3).

It is in this specific *open* and fluid context that I would like to consider the formation and representation of British identity.

1.2. *Britishness* and multiculturalism

As for Britain, it is undeniable that since its heterogeneous early formation it has been problematic to characterize its national identity, but when Britishness is mentioned, one immediately realizes there are some peculiar idiosyncrasies that have helped to differentiate British people from other peoples (Kostyuk, 2007: 33). By the mid-eighteenth century, Britain was already a nation-state composed of four sub-nations - the Irish, the Scots, the Welsh, and the English. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Britain was represented symbolically by both masculine and feminine personalities such as *John Bull* and *Britannia*. According to Hofstede, *John Bull* represented stolid British “masculinity” (Hofstede, 2001:333) while Wintle argues that *Britannia* symbolized the nation “bursting with pride and self-assertion” (Wintle, 2008:234). During the period of the formation of the United Kingdom, the sub-nations were united by a civic rather than by an ethnic definition of belonging, i.e., by an (assumed) shared attachment to certain institutions: the Crown, Parliament, and the rule of law. The very process of establishment of the United Kingdom as a nation was an incremental, complex, troubled and sometimes violent *course*. Take the example of the century long Irish Question, in which Ireland was so bitterly divided and affected by a climate of sectarian hatred and violence, and by the painful course of a process that took a long time for the British to regard as one of decolonization.

Wachinger alleges that the creation of a national identity, as far as Britain is concerned, goes beyond the accentuation of “difference from what lies outside, by fracturing and disallowing others” (Wachinger, 2003: 24). Great Britain’s identity has always been a more demanding one to define given its relation with its empire. “On the one hand, deploying the naturalising metaphor of the 'mother country', the colonies were embraced as (unruly) offspring; on the other hand, the imperial beyond was disavowed according to a Manichean economy of racial and even metaphysical difference”(ibid:24).

The terms *Britishness* and *Englishness* have been frequently confused reflecting, to a certain extent, enduring signs of the imperial British state. According to Robert Young, *Britishness* emerged as a “cunning word of apparent political correctness invoked in order to mask the metonymic extension of English dominance over the other kingdoms”, as a “name imposed by the English on the non-English” (Young cited by Wachinger, 2003: 24). Therefore, to be British was to belong to the political and administrative heart of the Empire whose cultural values were “imposed” on the colonies. As regards *Englishness*, it is suggested that its identity was connected much more with “the home culture” than with some type of imperialist inheritance (Wachinger, 2003: 24).

However, several authors have emphasized the difficulty in establishing the difference between *Britishness* and *Englishness*. To this end, Wachinger has contributed to what he has called “the discourse of convenience”, i.e. being British or English are concepts that “suit a nation’s individual needs, and it depends on when and how historical events occur”(Wachinger, 2003: 30). Hence, he argues, “The different appeal of Britishness and Englishness – on the one hand the imperial mission, on the other a national character in terms of cultural purity which must be preserved by cultural isolationism – is conspicuous in its strategic usage also in the discourse of Margaret Thatcher about the regained ‘Britishness’ of a community that proved militarily successful in the Falkland war” (ibid: 25).

Other writers such as Hobsbawn and Ranger have pointed out that when nations are in grave peril and facing economical and political difficulties, communities imagine and assert as their own the nation’s “remotest antiquity” (ibid: 25) i.e. a set of “core values, beliefs and attitudes” labelled as “cultural

Englishness” (Miller, 1995:172). These are core values, beliefs and attitudes which, obviously, include the well-known figure of the English gentleman. “It was an English product. It encapsulated many clichés about the English character: love of property but respect for persons; a certain *savoir faire* going with no great intellectuality [...]; a certain respect for amateurism; a cult of good manner [...]” (Bernard Crick, cited by Wachinger, 2003: 28).

As remarked by Storry and Childs, “cultural identity is in many ways about representation” (Storry & Childs, 1997:25). Freud observed that “an idea, an ‘abstraction’ can easily constitute the object of common identification.” Easthope states that the people of a nation can easily identify themselves with “objects of national identification”. In addition, he draws attention to the process of “collective identification” which is characterized as dynamic and “active” (Easthope, 1999:18-19). As a nation–state, Britain does not often succeed in uniting the nation, for it has rarely succeeded in representing the nation of Britain unless, perhaps in the National Lottery, some royal celebrations and mass media institutions like the BBC (Storry & Childs, 1997:4-5).

In sporting terms, the Olympic Games have been able to unite this nation-state so full of intricate popular nationalisms, even if the British “had never been completely comfortable with an event created by a Frenchman” (Holt & Mason, 2000: 142). Popular nationalisms between Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland have been partly inspired by sports like football and rugby. Prejudice against the English was common among Scottish rugby fans and English players were often booed off. Scottish football fans did not behave less disrespectfully when in 1977 the chant “Give us an Assembly, we’ll give you back your Wembley”, was heard after having dug up the turf of Wembley (ibid: 135). In Northern Ireland, the panorama looked even worse since sport was very much politicized on a sectarian basis and seemed to exert anything but a unifying influence.¹⁰ In a country founded over deep historical divisions, football has worsened considerably the existing hatreds and even saw the drawing up of two separate Irish Leagues. Violence became so serious that it reached the point of

¹⁰ Holt & Mason claim that the IRA came even to recruit and use elements from the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) , “which had been formed in the late nineteenth century to challenge what was perceived as British sporting imperialism.” (Holt & Mason, 2000: 138)

being impossible to continue the game during the nearly three decades of The Troubles. Rugby nonetheless strove to keep Catholics and Protestants together. The “sport of the privately educated urban middle classes was an all- Ireland structure in which the social solidarity of professional men kept nationalist antagonism at bay” (ibid: 139). This idea of national belonging and identity can encourage stereotyping since “Stereotyping imparts a sense of fixedness to the homogenised images it disseminates. It attempts to establish an attributed characteristic as natural and given in ways inseparable from the relations of power and domination through which it operates” (Pickering, 2001: 5).

Hence, stereotyping is often aggressively reductive when addressing issues of national identity. When people are regarded as a group, they tend to be distinguished from other groups. Therefore, when the British are stereotyped as gentlemen, we are portraying the whole nation homogeneously and attributing this characteristic to every British male when it is plainly little more than a class-based ideal. This conception seems to be useful when it deals with positive stereotyping but when it comes to negative stereotyping such as hooliganism, the tendency is to exclude the “nation” from this image and attribute negative stereotyping to some foreigners, or to foreign or unrepresentative elements.

After 1945, with its inherent post-war problems as well as “the fall of the empire”, a proud, powerful and self-confident Britain gave place to a sceptical and quite insecure nation. In the late 1950s, Britain opened its doors to black emigration from the Commonwealth. In fact, black citizens were “actively encouraged” to migrate to Britain (Davis, 2004: 70). However, when in the 1970s economic decline set in, the apparent calm of Commonwealth emigration relationships was disturbed and tensions intensified especially after the 1971 Immigration Act “identifying all Commonwealth citizens as alien immigrants (ibid: 70). In *Identity and Diaspora*, Stuart Hall, who has long shown his concern about identity, *Britishness* and the rapidly changing nature of multicultural British society, expresses his feeling of exclusion from a country which still regards immigrants as different: “We belong to the marginal, the underdeveloped, the periphery, the 'Other'. We are at the outer edge, the 'rim', of the metropolitan world - always 'South' to someone else's *El Norte*” (Hall, 1990: 228). Then again, in 1999, Hall

said in a Radio interview, “I used to be an Afro-Caribbean. And now I would regard myself as black British...I am, you know, one of the new cosmopolitans. There are millions of us” (Holt& Mason, 2000: 143).

It is observable that since the late eighteenth century, several efforts have been made in order to unite the whole of Europe by *one code, one court of appeal and one coinage*, but the British persist in maintaining a different/ particular position towards their integration in Europe. During Wilson’s Government (1964-1970), Britain was divided in relation to the country’s entry in the European Common Market, especially following its first failed bid in 1963. When the French President Charles de Gaulle insisted on using his second veto in 1967, the British had no alternative but to feel the “pain of exclusion” (Morgan, 1997:132-149). Britain’s attitude in relation to Europe continued to be a non-collegial one for, even after its entry into the then EEC, in 1973, Britain demanded a rebate on its budget contribution, refused to join the official European currency in 1999, and has maintained a palpably Euro-sceptic position in respect of many, if not most of the agenda items of the European Union.

On the subject of sceptical relationships, an association can be made between Britain’s entry into the European Community and Britain’s joining the Olympic movement since both were decisions taken by conflicted individuals and organisations. In both processes, Britain put itself apart in the initial stages of their construction. Perhaps this was because in the case of both *movements*, their old French neighbours were the principal founding fathers, Robert Schuman and Pierre de Coubertin respectively.

The sensitive issue of British national identity seems to be an everlasting problem that has always aroused academics as well as policy-makers’ interest. Gordon Brown’s speech: “Who do we want to be? The future of Britishness” at the “Fabians’ New Year Conference 2006” questioned once more the quintessence of the British people as well as their values and aims:

‘Let me also suggest that it is because that loss of confidence led too many to retreat into the idea of Britain, Britain as little more than institutions that never changed so [sic] for decades, for fear of losing our British identity, Britain did not face up to some of the great constitutional questions, whether

it be the second chamber, the relationship of the legislative to the executive or the future of local government.

'Take also the unity of the United Kingdom and its component parts. While we have always been a country of different nations and thus of plural identities a Welshman can be Welsh and British, just as a Cornishman or woman is Cornish, English and British - and may be Muslim, Pakistani or Afro-Caribbean, Cornish, English and British there is always a risk that, when people are insecure, they retreat into more exclusive identities rooted in 19th century conceptions of blood, race and territory when instead, we the British people should be able to gain great strength from celebrating a British identity which is bigger than the sum of its parts and a union that is strong because of the values we share and because of the way these values are expressed through our history and our institutions. And take the most recent illustration of what challenges us to be more explicit about Britishness: the debate about asylum and immigration and about multiculturalism and inclusion, issues that are particularly potent because in a fast changing world people who are insecure need to be rooted. Here the question is essentially whether our national identity is defined by values we share in common or just by race and ethnicity a definition that would leave our country at risk of relapsing into a wrongheaded 'cricket test' of loyalty' (Brown, 2006).¹¹

Such words were meant to express the British government's determination to reinforce the confidence of their citizens as well as an attempt to clarify Britain's self-image. A nation that, when unified, will be stronger and more able to face harder battles/questions such as citizenship, integration of minorities into a modern Britain and internationalism/globalization. The issue seems to be that Britain has to decide what its identity is in order to be engaged with Europe and deal with the rest of the world. Otherwise, Britain will get lost in uncertainties and will not be able to play a more important role in global society.

In 1947 Sir Ernest Barker summarized the English character in terms of six constant features: "Social homogeneity"; "amateurism"; "the idea of the gentleman"; "the voluntary habit"; "eccentricity" and, "youthfulness" - love of nonsense, simple play, humour and joke (Barker, 1995: 55-63). Curiously, in 1995,

¹¹Source: <http://www.fabians.org.uk/events/speeches/the-future-of-britishness>

in the short witty animated film sponsored by the EU, *Know your Europeans*, (1995) the British are described as “elusive, inconclusive, unobtrusive”. Among other characteristics given there,

“The British are a nation of considerable antiquity
Who colonised the globe with remarkable ubiquity.
They turn up everywhere from Abu Dhabi to Nigeria.
And quickly show the natives what it means to be superior.
(...) The British are devoted to the Arts
Are intellectual,
At sport enthusiastic but entirely ineffectual
They have patented inventions of amazing ingenuity;
Their efforts gastronomical are viewed with ambiguity. (...)
The British are eccentric, unreserved and unconventional.
Stiff upper-lipped and buttoned-up, hidebound and condescensional
Permissive and profane and positively puritanical,
Bohemian and Bloomsbury, Bucolic and Botanical
(...).Actually I think it is something to do with the climate”

At the end, and, after “serious contemplation”, the film remarks on the complexity of characterizing the people of a nation like the United Kingdom saying:

“We are back where we began
And we haven't got the foggiest
What constitutes
The British man...and woman”

(*Know your Europeans*, dir. Bob Godfrey, 1995)

So, to recall Ezra Pound's words who wrote that “The real meditation is... the meditation on one's identity. (...) You try it. You try finding out why you're you and not somebody else. And who in the blazes are you anyhow? Ah, voilà une chose!” (Ezra Pound (1885-1972) the question now would be “And who in the blazes are the *British*¹² anyhow? Ah, voilà une chose!

¹² This is my word and italics.

1.3. Contemporary cosmopolitan identity: *Londonness*

Once described by the political leader Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881) as “a roost for every bird” (Disraeli, 1975:39), London is a mighty metropolis where stately buildings, elegant parks and rows of Victorian terraced housing occupy this urban city. Already preparing the ground for the 2012 Olympics, the UK capital is home to world-class cultural and historic attractions and some of the most modern shopping. London seems to be not so much a city as a *mélange* of parks, joined together by museums and galleries, office buildings and shops. London is a city where the youthful energy and digital billboards of Tokyo meet the solid and majestic Edwardian architecture of Regent Street. At over 7.47 million inhabitants in 2006,¹³ this densely populated metropolis, in which the latest provisional data of overseas visitors showed 4 million visitors during the holiday peak of 2009¹⁴, is marked by a very diverse and mobile society. This diversity is not only due to the high percentage of tourists from many different countries of origin, but also because of the great migrant populations, who in many cases have been living in London for more than one generation. Notwithstanding, this cosmopolitan city has been very welcoming over the course of its history. London has been home to celebrities as varied as Winston Churchill, Virginia Woolf, Karl Marx, Mahatma Gandhi, Stanley Kubrick, Paula Rego, Eça de Queiroz and Jimmy Hendrix. An example of this, are the 800 *London's blue plaques*, founded in 1866 that are intended to commemorate the city's close ties with notable figures of the past and the buildings in which they lived and worked, guiding visitors through another time “where the great and the good have penned their masterpieces, developed new technologies, lived or died.”¹⁵

But what does it mean to be a Londoner? The question should begin with whether there is a *Londonness* identity. As it appears to many intellectuals, *Londonness* is no less problematic in terms of identity than *Britishness*. The expression “We love our city and we belong to it. Neither of us is English, we're

¹³ Source: <http://www.optimumpopulation.org/opt.toomany.uk.html> (according to ONS data)

¹⁴ Source: http://www.visitlondonmediacentre.com/facts_figures/monthly_trends/

¹⁵ Source: <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/nav.1495>

Londoners you see”¹⁶ (Wachinger, 2003:161), seems to outline a clear division between *Englishness* and *Londonness*, at least in the way the city is seen by descendents of immigrants.¹⁷ In this case, it is not London that contains a post-colonial flavour but England. Thus, to be a Londoner implies much more than to be English or British. Living or belonging to a city space like London has numerous meanings ranging from modernity, heterogeneity, simultaneity, richness, variety, urbanity, multi-ethnicity, creativity to multiculturalism. *Londonness* stands in marked contrast to other British cities. As put by Wachinger, “Especially London seems the perfect urban locale in terms of cosmopolitan availability, and detachment from cultural parochialism” (ibid: 157). Wachinger’s words, however, do not seem to completely define the suburbs of Essex or south east London.

Conversely, *Londonness* now contains a post-colonialist dimension, since London was, for a very long time, read “as the heart of Empire, the centre of the imperial centre”. At least, that is how it is evoked at the beginning of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Wachinger writes that:

‘As the imperial project was predicated on certain core values of ‘Englishness’, London – the focal point in the underlying cartography of power – came metonymically to represent ‘Englishness’. If now, (...) London may be seen less and less as a nationally defined space but rather as a ‘world city’, this does not at all detach London from its former meaning as centre of a British colonial power enacted *upon* the whole world. Already the now-standard usage of the spatial rhetoric in which ‘metropolitan’ characterises the First World suggests the ongoing vitality of the allegedly anachronistic significance of the city as embodiment of the national culture’s values. Hence, as John Clement Ball argues correctly, London “continues to project and to be associated with images of the old imperial city” (ibid: 158).

Imperial London’s iconic places and traditions reflect the capital’s sense of continuity and its pride in its past. Take the examples of Big Ben, The Palace of Westminster or Buckingham Palace, which represent tradition and permanence. These examples of the past heavy with their imperial symbolism cohabit with

¹⁶ Passage from the film *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987), directed by Stephen Frears and written by Hanif Kureishi (cited by Wachinger, 2003:161)

¹⁷ The author of this passage is a descendent of Pakistanis.

workaday representations such as the British bobby or the lollipop lady/man. In the early 20th century, the noisy and crowded Piccadilly Circus introduced a new and modern character to the city altering the capital's mood. London's attempt to forget its imperialist architectural past was materialized in the rebuilding and somehow remodelling of a cleaner, healthier and more efficient city that projected the future. The spirit of this era created three classic London icons which combined tradition, modernity, simplicity, cleverness and democratic values since they could be used by everybody in an easy and cheap way: the London Underground system and its emblematic tube map designed by Harry Beck (1931), the Routemaster bus (1954) and the red telephone box by Giles Gilbert Scott (1880-1960) (Barker and Jackson, 1974: 306).

In "the swinging sixties" (Storry & Childs, 1997: 62), in the era of the so-called "personal liberation" and "classless style" (Morgan, 1997: 149), London's image began to be redesigned and it became a lively centre for youth culture. During the Wilson's years, "The popular consumer culture of the Beatles, Mary Quant and Carnaby Street was allied to the sexual freedom provided by the pill" (ibid: 149). It is not surprising that the most powerful icons of this period came from fashion and pop music, such as Mary Quant's miniskirts, Twiggy and the Beatles. In the late 1970's, groups such as The Sex Pistols started the punk period, expressing their anger against society and "the self-loathing spirit of the times as the Beatles had expressed the geeky optimism of an earlier Britain" (Marr, 2007:361). The King's Road Punks' colourful and spiky hairstyles as well as Vivienne Westwood's darker fashion statements, including torn clothes, were among many *London looks* which transformed London into a unique, fascinating and *edgy* metropolis attracting millions of tourists from around the world.

Towards the end of the 20th century, Britain was living under the "autocratic" government of "The Iron Lady" (1979-1990) where inequalities had been accentuated and unemployment rates had risen and a tremendous social gap had been fostered (Hirst, 1997: 212-215). London became a city with a much more complex, driven, meritocratic identity. Neo-liberalism and American consumerism transformed multicultural London into one of the world's great financial hubs, which is illustrated by the large number of overseas banks based

there. So it was that “in a modern consumer culture such as Britain’s, the past is often used for commercial profit or for charity: ‘punks are quite likely to be art students looking to supplement their grants by simulating a Britishness for photographers (...)’” (Storry & Childs, 1997: 62-3). With a growing sense of its own identity as a city of multiple cultures, multi races, multi religious and increasing ethnic diversity, London began to promote itself overseas as the “home of youth”, as a city with a “global identity” where differences should be valued. However, new thrusting businesses have taken over the ‘*old*’ London, and tourism and service industry are outstripping manufacturing activities, the latter a cherished bearer of “traditional cultural values.” As put by Storry & Childs, “Businesses have relinquished some of the British ‘traditions’ orientated around being ‘one of us’, ‘fair play’, ‘security’, ‘seniority’, ‘loyalty’, for the priorities of the global market: ‘profit’, ‘risk’, ‘meritocracy’, and ‘individual goals’” (ibid: 320).

Currently, icons associated with modern multicultural London identity consist of places such as China Town or the fabricated London Dungeon; things like good Indian food rather than *fish and chips* (a London fish and chip shop will almost certainly be run by a person of eastern extraction, probably in tandem with Donner kebabs); events such as the Lord Mayor’s Show occur cheek by jowl with the Chinese New Year Parade and Notting Hill’s Carribean-style Carnaval.

London can be considered an excellent example of a pluricultural urban society. In London, one finds a diversity of people living not only side by side but, more significantly, interacting harmoniously, taking an interest in one other, and trying to learn about each other’s different cultures and languages. As far as identity is concerned, it might be concluded that *Londonness* has come to signify ‘pluriculturalism’ to the extent that the city congregates nearly every race, religion and people and that each one contributes to the city’s identity. London is at present making every effort to develop into an ‘all-inclusive’ city. Though made back in time and propagandistic in tone, the short film *Journey by a London Bus* (1950), mentioned in chapter two was already promoting inclusiveness as well as the “friendly spirit of co-operation” of British road transport services, and London in particular. (see *Journey by a London Bus*, 1950).

Chapter 2

Contextualising the Hosting of Previous London Olympics

2.1. The London Olympic Games: 1908

It was to be the best and worst of Games.

(Baker 2008: 158)

The 1908 Olympic Games were originally scheduled to be celebrated in Rome. Unfortunately, the 1906 eruption of Mount Vesuvius devastated Italy and the funds needed to be re-applied to the reconstruction of Naples.¹⁸ In the meantime, the Games had to be relocated elsewhere within eighteen months. (Cf. Norridge, 2008: 342; Tames, 2007:39). It seemed that Great Britain was one of the few countries to have “the wherewithal to rescue the 1908 Games at such desperately short notice” (Baker, 2008: 4) and London accepted the challenge of the International Olympic Committee. Lord Desborough, Baron de Coubertin’s powerful friend, was a sports lover and “proved very influential in ensuring that all the preparatory work for the Games was completed on time” (Baker, 2008:10). This challenge was carried out with the greatest efficiency and at a high organisational level, as mentioned by several writers and historians on the Modern Olympics.¹⁹ The already existing British Olympic Association (BOA) was turned into the British Olympic Council (BOC) under Desborough and Laffan’s scrupulous

¹⁸ However, according to McIntire 2009 article in *Media History* the Italian government had already decided not to continue with the games before the eruption of Mount Vesuvius.

¹⁹“1908 was different. (...) London stood in at just eighteen months’ notice. The games were a success and the British, perhaps not surprisingly, comfortably headed the overall medal table” (Norridge, 2008: 342); “The press celebrated the host country’s victories with headlines and crossheads like ‘BRITISH SUCCESSES’, ‘ENGLAND’S WIN’, ‘BRITISH SUCCESSES AT THE OLYMPIC GAMES / FOUR VICTORIES TO AMERICA’S TWO’, ‘MANY BRITISH SUCCESSES’ and ‘BRITAIN CAPTURES EVERY TRACK EVENT’ (*Daily Telegraph* 15 July; *Evening News* 15 July; *Daily Mail* 16 July; *Lloyd’s Weekly News* 19 July; *Daily News* 20 July).’ (McIntire in *Media History*); “With barely two years’ notice and with limited resources, the organizers managed to stage the best- organized Games and the largest and most representative gathering of athletes ever before seen” (Baker, 2008:6).

orientation. The spectre of the two previous Games in Paris (1900) and in St Louis (1904) were clouding the Olympic ideal but the British were resolved to show they shared De Coubertin's principles and were organised enough to turn around the chaotic tendencies of former Games.

Given the Edwardian belief that sporting events should be undertaken at private expenses, without the government's financial support, the British Olympic Council had an arduous task on their hands. Providentially, the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition organisers offered to build the stadium and all the necessary facilities. On May 14th 1908 "the first-purpose built Olympic Stadium was opened at the White City, Shepherd's Bush, in west London" (Tames, 2007: 4) and, despite the meagre financial resources, the British Olympic Council managed to approve a programme which included a larger number of different sports, introducing hockey and diving for the first time; to organise different events at different locations; to get the support of the general public and to make "more than £ 6,000" profit (Baker, 2008: 14-15).

Until the London 1908 Olympics, it had been difficult to establish "fair judgment" in the Games seeing that an international code accepted by all nations was required and was still lacking. In fact, the "enormous task of drawing up the details of a complete code of Olympic rules for all sports concerned would never have been achieved unless the executive power had been entrusted to the great British sporting associations (...)"²⁰(Baker, 2008: 158).

Equally important was the contribution that the 1908 London Olympics made to encourage the participation of women, who, according to Baker, participated in the lawn tennis, (restored to the Games), competed for the first time in the figure ice-skating and were included in a "demonstration event for women gymnasts" (Baker, 2008: 16). However, and although during the late Victorian and Edwardian periods there was an increase in the participation of the middle-class as well as elite females in sport, Tranter states that they had access "only to a narrow range of events and, along with female rowers and athletes, they were

²⁰ "Concepts such as national teams, entry standards and the use of preliminary heats were established which set the pattern for future Olympics. The definition of amateurism was clarified. The standard for future international swimming was set by building a 100-metre pool, clearly marked into lanes" (Baker, 2008: 159).

excluded from participation in the London Olympics of 1908” (Tranter, 1998: 80-82). Similarly, Holt wrote that athletic events for women were hardly noticeable by 1908 and that before the 1948 Olympics women were allowed to “only three track competitions” (Holt, 1989:130). Holt continues saying that the active participation of women in sport was, however, considered an infiltration and “feminisation” of a man’s world. Considered a male public sphere, sport was a world where females were usually not allowed access. “Fundamentally, sport remained a symbol and prerogative of masculinity, a reminder and reinforcer of gender differences”, although there were changes concerning the number and the nature of adult elite women participation (Tranter, 1998:80-91).

The initial glow of the 1908 London Olympics was soon darkened by noteworthy procedures and problems whose deficient resolution would eventually benefit future Games (Baker, 2008: 160-166). According to Cook’s Official Report of the Olympic Games of 1908, the generally known “English love of fair play” led the International Olympic Committee to delegate the responsibility for judging all the competitions to the British Associations (Cook, 1909: 374-5). Such a resolution was clearly ill-advised as it gathered immense criticism not only from the competitors but also from the countries they represented, increased rivalries with the Americans and led inevitably to diverse injustices (Baker, 2008: 31- 35). As Bob Phillips has put it “all of these cankers had blighted Games in the past, and particularly those of 1908 in London which had been a wrangle between the British and the Americans from start to finish” (Phillips, 2007:130). In the capital city, “nationalism definitely became much more institutionalised and it took on a more strident tone. (...) The flying of national flags, the parade of the teams, the medal awards, and the partisan press reports, all fuelled nationalistic feelings and emotions” (Baker, 2008: 163).

The English were criticised for what they had formerly been most honoured, that is, lack of sportsmanship and integrity. Since its inception, the Games were fraught with American and British wrangling, which was intensified by some sad officiating episodes, of which two deserve attention. Baker and Naul allege that, the legend “This flag dips to no earthly king” when the American athlete, Ralph Rose did not lower the flag in the opening ceremony as protocol required was the

first major incident of this bickering phase.²¹ The second concerns the disqualification from the marathon of “the first sporting superstar”, Dorando Pietri, after American protests. The Italian marathon runner, whose “brilliant performance” earned him the world’s appreciation, received a gold cup from Queen Alexandra’s hands for the strong will shown in the final yards of the marathon (Baker, 2008:51-61; Naul, 1997: 85-86). Pietri was the first athlete to get into the stadium but exhaustion made him collapse on the ground. The “little Italian” was then massively supported by the crowd and the British officials gave him a hand across the line, violating the rules. Pietri was declared winner of one of the most important sporting events of the Olympic Games but, after the American protests, the American Johnny Hayes was then considered the official winner of the 1908 marathon (Cook, 1909:78). However, “overnight Pietri became an international celebrity, the first sporting star. In unofficial terms he was treated as the winner” (Baker, 2008:59). This event seems to be suggestive of the future political polarisation that the Olympics would stage, rather than the personal merit of the athlete that Pietri so humanly represents.

According to Katharine Moore, the period leading up to Britain’s first modern Olympic Games was one of several important changes both in terms of international politics and in the sporting, cultural and political fields. As she emphasises “central among them was the subtle but real shifting of world power away from Great Britain” (Naul, 1997: 71). The United States and Germany started to challenge British leadership given that with the end of the American Civil War and the unification of Germany, both countries were experiencing unprecedented periods of economic growth. France, Russia and Germany started a dangerous process of military build-ups that also came to threaten the Royal Navy’s domination of the seas. The extremely bloody Boer War of 1899-1902 left enduring scars which shamed the British people. “A period of painful self-examination followed that war, and in an era of increasing uncertainty about the political future of the Empire, the Olympic Games came to London at short notice” (ibid: 80). Overseas the American trend of serious training of competitors contrasted with the

²¹ However, others argue that this legend became a custom only at the 1936 Olympics. (Dyreson, 2008:142 – 162)

British “strict amateur code”, which would also “lead to increase antagonism in the Olympic Games” (ibid: 80).

At home and by the time the Games came to London, King Edward VII, the first “true constitutional monarch”, was ruling the United Kingdom and the “annexed territories” (Bassnett, 2001: 496). The Boers War, whose effects Britain was still suffering from in 1908, had forced Britain to spend large sums of money and to face severe economic problems. As Susan Bassnett wrote: “The comfortable middle-class Britain of the Edwardian Era concealed appalling poverty and social divisiveness. Even as Beatrix Potter published her beautifully illustrated little books on furry animals (...) millions of children were living close to the breadline in London’s East End, in rural areas, in the industrial cities of England and Scotland” (ibid: 496).

Sporting activities were more and more “codified and standardised” and the British response to the Olympic movement was highly influenced by “domestic activities and a large measure of ingrained ethnocentrism” (Naul, 1997:72). Amateurism and nationalism were at their height at this time and in particular during the 1908 London Games, which “glorified the amateur athlete as a symbol of British prowess in the world. British manhood had to be seen to triumph both physically and morally on the world stage, and thus the old professional tradition was pushed to the sidelines” (Holt, 1989:185). The ideal of Coubertin and *the real nature* of the Olympics started to change:

Coubertin did not wish to promote nationalism, which he defined as hostility to other countries. On the contrary, he sought to foster ‘patriotism’, which he felt combined the love of one’s own country with an acceptance and appreciation of the love other peoples felt for theirs. Sport was to be the means of recognizing differences between peoples within the wider framework of a common humanity deriving from Greek culture – ‘the Esperanto of the races’ as Jean Giradoux was later to put it. The Olympic Games aimed to foster a religion of patriotism, directing the new power of national identity into constructive and peaceful channels. Hence the significance of the sacred plants, flights of birds, wreaths, and other religious symbols and ceremonies. (ibid: 274)

Coubertin's idealism did not, of course, foresee the political and national displays the Olympics fiercely took during the Cold War nor the ideological differences of the present. As far as one can see, the relationship between Britain and the Olympic movement was conflicted, as on the one hand the British loved sport and could be defenders of the ideals of Coubertin but, on the other hand, they could not deal with or accept the intervention of *others* (my italics) in how the Games were regulated. As Robinson put it, "England has never had any affection for the Olympic Games...from the point of view of our own convenience they were rather a nuisance. We had all the sport that we needed" (H. Perry Robinson cited by Naul, 1997:87).

2.2. The London Olympic Games: 1948

The important thing in the Olympic games is not winning but taking part. The essential thing in life is not conquering but fighting well.

Baron de Coubertin in Phillips, 2007

It became obvious in very short order that the passage of a decade and the shattering experiences of the greatest war in world history had done nothing to smooth the rugged path laid out for those who would organize a celebration of the Olympic games. The world was greatly changed, but the human race remained pretty much the same.

(Henry, Bill 1984: 270)

In the aftermath of World War II, the future of the Modern Olympic Games was uncertain. Since the time of the attempt to show Aryan supremacy in the 1936 Berlin Games, no other Olympiads had been held. An interregnum of twelve years in which countries like Japan, Finland and Great Britain had already been appointed to hosting the Games, followed. "A wish to remain on good terms with Japan also led the Foreign Office to exert pressure on the British Olympic Association to withdraw London's bid to stage the 1940 Olympics in favour of Tokyo" (Holt, 2000: 160). In fact, Britain wanted so badly to "remain on good terms

with Japan that the Foreign Office secretly told the British Olympic Committee to support Tokyo as the site of the 1940 Olympic Games at a meeting of the IOC in the face of the widespread feelings that the Games could not be held in a country at war with China, a fellow member of the Olympic movement” (Mason, 1997:19).

In 1945 the British Lord Aberdare, the Swedish Sigfrid Edström and the American Avery Brundage decided to meet and combine efforts in order to reinstate and revitalize the Modern Olympics and thus the possibility of London holding the Games was ventilated. Once the Games were given to London, Germany and Japan were not invited and the Soviet Union declined the call, foreseeing the eminent political separation of the world that Winston Churchill described as the descending of the “Iron Curtain”.

On July 29th 1948, at Wembley Stadium, in the Opening Ceremony, before a crowd of 6000 athletes representing 59 nations, Lord Burghley's Speech summarised the spirit of the first post war Games in a social and political context where Europe had to emerge from the ashes of war:

The hour has struck. A visionary dream has to-day become a glorious reality. At the end of the world-wide struggle in 1945, many institutions and associations were found to have withered and only the strongest had survived. How, many wondered, had the great Olympic Movement prospered? (...)

For the next two weeks, these young men and young women will be engaged in keen but friendly rivalry, competing together in the highest traditions of our Olympic ideals and of Amateur Sport. The eyes of the world to-day, and for the next fourteen days, will be on London. Not only will they be turned towards this ancient City to follow the fortunes of their champions and those of other countries, but also, I believe that in the hearts of millions of men and women in every corner of the earth, that warm flame of hope, for a better understanding in the world which has burned so low, will flare up into a very beacon, pointing a way to the goal through the Fellowship of Sport.

These Games are a living proof of this great common bond of sportsmanship that binds the youth of the world together. They take place under rules drawn up by common accord and respected by all, not only in the letter of the law but also in the spirit. These high ideals are the very life blood of the Olympic Games, and if, as I believe and pray, as a result of them, the Olympic spirit spreads yet more widely throughout the earth, then, surely, we can feel

that a very real contribution has been made to the welfare and happiness of mankind.(...) Like all steps forward in the panorama of history, the Olympic Movement has not escaped entirely the pointed barbs of the critics, but these have but acted as a spur to increase the speed of its advance (Burghley, 1948:221-2).

According to Phillips, the choice of locating the Olympic Games only three years after the end of World War II in London was a *fait accompli* to which the aristocratic and autocratic constitution of the International Olympic Committee at the time largely contributed. As underlined by the same author, The International Olympic Committee “was not then, nor is it now, a freely elected democratic body. It was unashamedly patrician in its constitution and its rules stated that it could select “such persons as it considers qualified to be its members, provided that they speak French or English and are citizens of and reside in a country which possesses a National Olympic Committee” (Phillips, 2007: 3). Furthermore, as mentioned in *Sport in Britain 1945-2000*, it can also be assumed that London was expected to host the first post war Olympics given that it had been appointed to hold the aborted 1944 Games, four years before (Holt and Mason, 2000:27).

On the other hand, the British had long been regarded as a people of gentlemanliness and politeness either in sports or in their relations with others which, in the post war era, was considered a valuable contribution to soothing the existing tensions. As stressed in *Rude Britannia* “the description of the British as a polite and commercial people was coined in the eighteenth century, and politeness is still perceived by some as a defining feature of national identity” (Gorji, 2007:14). This belief, together with the ideals of amateurism promoted by the *gentlemen elite*, characterized beyond doubt the 1948 Games.

The ‘blazerati’ were back – in truth they had never gone away - and took over the running of the 1948 Olympic Games, promoting an ideal of amateurism which equated competing for money with a loss of moral fibre. Remarkably, most athletes agreed that being paid to play would be wrong, though they wanted a more realistic system of expenses – a looser kind of amateurism. (Holt and Mason, 2000: 172)

It was possible for many cities in the United States of America to host this important event, as mentioned by Norman Baker. Yet, it was felt that the dominant countries within the Olympic Movement were European and the vast distance that separated both continents would require strong economic efforts which most European countries suffering from the consequences of such a harsh conflict were not prepared to face (Phillips, 2007: 5-8).

Last but not of the least importance seemed to be the need to reassert Britain's international importance at a time when the British Empire was showing signs of falling apart and the importance of the United States of America as "leader of the free world" was rising. The United States had long since become "the single most important influence on world stability, growth, and development" (Brown & Louis, 1999: 28). Subsequently, as host country of the XIV Olympiad, and in spite of its devastation, Britain foresaw a unique opportunity to put before the world's gaze the triumph of British determination, their organizational skills, and a chance to put the nation on the world stage again.

As pointed out before, the Second World War changed the face of the modern world and consequently the nature of the British Empire, which had already begun to change with the Commonwealth (1931) and continued to evolve into being a multiracial association of sovereign and equal states. This process began with the end of the Raj that would give way to India and Pakistan's independence in 1947 and later that of Bangladesh. The British had to liberate their most important colony, India – the Jewel of the Crown, – and consequently became militarily, politically and economically weaker. This belief is recalled by historian Roger Louis when he writes that "As long as we rule in India" the Viceroy, Lord Curzon, stated in 1901 "we are the greatest power in the world. If we lose it we shall drop straight away to a third rate power"(Brown & Louis, 1999:5). Attlee's declaration of India's independence meant much more than just to recognise India's right to self-government; it meant that Britain was no longer a world power in 1947; if India was to go, what would follow? The loss of India plunged many British into an identity crisis. What would Britain's role now be? Where would it fit in Europe and in the world?

Over the next five decades a number of key landmarks followed. Two of these important milestones in Commonwealth history were to accept India as a member in 1949 and to exclude the word *British* from the association's title (and thus the implied role of Head of the Commonwealth). In spite of their distinct political constitutions, (today 32 members are republics, five have national monarchies of their own and sixteen are constitutional monarchies) all, however, accept the British Queen as symbolic head of The Commonwealth.

From 1947 on, Britain became dependent on the United States when accepting the Marshall Plan's support to alleviate the crisis. In fact, this help proved to be of the utmost importance as confidence returned to the country and to Europe in general.

Though the country was short of dollars, the generosity of Marshall Plan aid the following year had removed the immediate sense of crisis. By 1949, it was estimated to have raised the country's national income by a tenth. Responding to the national mood of revolt over restrictions and shortages, Wilson had announced a 'bonfire of controls' in 1948 and there seemed some chance that Labour ministers would follow the change in national mood and accept that the British wanted to spend, not only to queue (Marr, 2007: 107).

In this context of restrictions and tribulations, London got the Games, but this time, a bit paradoxically but also significantly, with the precious help and support of the government, personified by a close colleague of Attlee, the Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin. According to Marr, Bevin was a patriot who believed in the power of the state and in "liberty as essential to the building of a fair society", but he was not enthusiastic about sport or a 'gentleman'" (ibid: 21). Interestingly, Bevin not only embraced the bid for the London Olympics, but also insightfully reinforced the idea of fostering the new concept of tourism. As a matter of fact, it was the awareness that the country could benefit from the development of its tourism industry that greatly helped Bevin obtain the government's support (Holt and Mason, 2000: 27-28).

Under Attlee's government, public information campaigns flourished and overseas tourism advertising was not forgotten. The London double-decker Bus was used as one of the major symbols of Great Britain, which they were able to

make well-known abroad. As underlined in the National Archives, in the post war period, the Prime Minister was interested in showing “a true and adequate picture of British institutions and the British way of life” for external consumption. An example of this is the propagandistic short film *Journey by a London Bus* (1950) promoting the excellence as well as the “friendly spirit of co-operation” of British road services and institutions. Surprisingly, the main characters are African students who get onto a Double-decker bus to *embark on a voyage* that goes beyond the literal into encountering and absorbing “the British way of life”. The film goes on to showcase a considerable number of *qualities* among which some are still associated with the British and, “have always impressed” overseas visitors: regularity, the punctuality and efficiency of transport; passengers’ cooperation who stay peacefully in queues; tolerance, courtesy and respect: “no rushing nor crowding to get in first, a child’s push cart could easily be a nuisance, but the conductor sees that it isn’t, and no one is hindered at all”; gentleness and consideration towards people’s disabilities for the reason that “a cripple needs much kindness in his affliction, it’s not easy for him to enter a bus, but friendly hands give help at once.” Special attention is also given to zebra crossings, alerting pedestrians to special areas marked on the roads for people who wish to walk across. To some extent, the closing phrase summarizes the image Britain intended to convey in this period: “Always in the thousands of London buses the same good service and civility of the staff is met by willing, orderly and friendly co-operation by the travelling public.”²² It’s worth noting that Margaret Thatcher moved heaven and earth in the 1980s to get rid of the bus conductor, leaving the driver as the sole custodian of his/her bus, but ever more locked in his/her booth for security reasons, leaving passengers to fend for themselves in the event of robbery or assault or simply casual rudeness. Surveillance cameras now abound on London buses; you may be bludgeoned to death but you can take solace from the fact that they will have your assailant’s picture at the police station. The one-operative bus then began to funnel people through the front past the driver rather than using more commodious points of entry/exit in the middle and rear of the bus. The Routemaster’s days were thus numbered, except as a nostalgic symbol.

²² Source: http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/films/19459to1951/filmpage_jbalb.htm

Perhaps no other change reflects the subordination of British social values to commercial ones, unless it be the disappearance of the Public Toilet.

The 1948 London Olympics, which according to Phillips have been described as “The Austerity Games”, brought up the possibility of encouraging, “cheering up” and entertaining the people who were living through the hard times of unpopular rationing, broken-down housing, bad weather and general austerity (Phillips, 2007:7).

The right to live in peace had been dearly paid for at the risk of life and limb, and the mere fact of physical survival was something to celebrate. Yet the conditions of everyday life were shabby and constricting. Work, though plentiful, was slow to bring the longed-for rewards of an ideal home with a chicken in the pot and a Morris Ten in the garage (Paul Addison, cited by Phillips, 2007: 7).

As large amounts of money were spent on and throughout the war, how would impoverished and dismayed Britain embark upon the London Olympics while overcoming the crippling post-war economic crisis? As shown in the National Archive’s Website, (British Government Public Information website), in the late 1940s, an assorted programme of informative, educational and sometimes amusing films were broadcast all over the country promoting Attlee’s innovative programmes. Short films as *Modern Guide to Health* (1947), *Charley’s March of Time* (1948) or *Charley Junior’s School Day* (1949) directed by Halas and Batchelor or Michael Law’s *Pedestrian Crossing* (1948) were meant not only to instruct and mollify people but also to help the Labour Government implement its political and social programme, particularly its crowning glory, the Welfare State, in sharp contrast to Hitler’s “warfare state” (Marwick, 2003:27). Interestingly enough, though perhaps a little propagandistic in tone, people’s quality of life subsumed in contemporary issues like the importance of exercise, walking around or cycling in the fresh air, correct postures, ecology, citizenship, education, clothing or a good night’s sleep were already being tackled in the above- mentioned short films.

Encouraged by Labour, the British attempted to make their own films and briefly got to build a prosperous film industry before Hollywood glamour began to

reassert itself. Cinema audiences rose considerably signalling its popularity among leisure activities (Marr, 2007: 89).

The name, nearly a slogan, given to the 1946 Exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum *Britain Can Make It!* is curiously similar to the recent Obama's *Yes, We Can!* campaign slogan and seems to illustrate another unmissable facet of post-war Britain: pride in its achievements, trying to modernize itself and willing to do anything to *muck through*. Through hard labour and sacrifices, in which the "make-do and mend ethos" was valued rather than the acquisition of new articles or commodities, a vast programme of nationalizations and an increase in exports, the economic policy of Labour Prime Minister Clement Attlee would eventually lead the population to better times (Marr, 2007: 36 – 53); Tomlinson, 1997: 89 - 100).

But the government's well-intentioned attempts to restore the country were not enough to revitalize the country's economy and were far from achieving Labour's socialist intents, given that Britain experienced hardly any social transformations, maintaining "ancient or ancient-seeming privileges, rituals and hierarchies" (Marr, 2007:47). After all, "This was a government of patriots first and socialists second" (ibid: 25). Furthermore, in the words of Steven Fielding "The war had not eradicated social differences and prejudices, but it had given people a sense that they shared a common interest, both in fighting Hitler and in voting Labour" (Fielding, 1997: 51). It was noted however that ethnic and race relations became softer after World War II but a way of increasing greater and more diverse participation in sport and leisure needed to be found. "Britain's black population was no more than 10,000 strong in 1939. Generations of imperialist propaganda, which found its way into children's comics and popular novels, had imbued most white Britons with an innate sense of superiority over blacks" (ibid: 39-40).

Understandably, post-war priorities did not include sports but it was later understood that, in due course, most of Labour's reforms were very significant for British sporting development.²³ With regard to British sporting culture, the post-war period had been an era of significant transformation, with increasing levels of active participation in sport. Although Holt and Mason argue that above all class,

²³ Holt and Mason refer to several benefits in *Sport in Britain 1945-2000* p.21.

gender, ethnicity and especially occupation remain the determinant factors of participation of the British in sport (Holt and Mason, 2000: 9-18). In spite of austerity, rationing does not seem to have greatly inhibited leisure activities and sports, particularly cinema, cricket and football. In fact, living under rationing and lacking goods to buy, the British had few alternatives other than traditional pastimes like for example gardening, which remained as popular as ever. Historians²⁴ agree that at the time, football and cricket were considered the dominant national sports. It was the “golden age” of a *relatively* uncorrupted football that later in the 1960s “replaced cricket as a national symbol in England” (Marr, 2007:87). The former national symbol “lost its cultural centrality. The game had been so deeply identified with the Empire and the idea of the English gentleman that it suffered particularly from decolonization and the gradual change in national mood after Suez” (Holt and Mason, 2000: 171-2). Football soon became the nation’s sport but it was nonetheless the finest football of all. According to Marr, by “1948-9 there were more than 40 million attendances at football matches and a general assumption that British football was the finest there was, something seemingly confirmed the previous May when Britain had played a team grandly if inaccurately named the Rest of the World (they comprised Danes, Swedes, a Frenchman, Italian, Swiss, Czech, Belgian, Dutchman and Irishman) and thrashed them 6-1” (Marr, 2009: 87). Curiously England “ignored” the World Cup for a long period and, ironically, when they decided to take part in 1950 they were defeated by the United States followed by Uruguay in 1954. Since then the World Cup has been won only once by the English team in 1966 (Norridge, 2008: 194). Phillips remembers that professional football was in good condition and was used to getting good results - the 1900, 1908 and 1912 Olympic tournaments had been won by British teams (Phillips, 2007: 209). But amateur football was weaker because after the war footballers had little time for training together as a Great Britain team. The IOC’s 1947 resolution regarding football amateurism advocated that an “amateur is one whose connection with sport is and always has been solely for pleasure and for the physical and moral benefits he derives therefrom, without material gain of any kind, direct or indirect. This definition is liberal in so far

²⁴ Holt and Mason, 2000:26; Marr, 2009: 88-9.

as it admits the reimbursement of actually lost salary and of real expenses of the athlete. (...)This definition is based upon the loyalty of the athletes and the honesty of the officials” (Phillips, 2007: 211). This resolution regarding football amateurism together with the amateur footballers’ lack of time was responsible for Great Britain’s poor results at the 1948 London Olympics (fourth place).

In an era not yet controlled by television, since only a minority had a television set, the London Olympics were nevertheless considered worthy of investment by the BBC. So, the *Austerity Games* were broadcast, albeit, before its beginning, the British were still suspicious of the Olympiads. As Norman Baker put it, “They were an international event staged in Britain, not a British event. Impressive and attractive though they might be once they actually arrived before the British public, the Olympics were not relished in anticipation by the majority of sports followers in Britain” (ibid: 9).

Minority groups such as women and disabled people continued to play a small part on the sporting stage. World War II brought something as yet unexperienced by women. In the absence of many men, they saw themselves invited and sometimes even conscripted to help in the war effort. “Indeed, Britain mobilized a far greater proportion of its female population than any other combatant nation. By 1943, the peak of the war effort, seven and a half million women were in paid employment; many found themselves in formerly men-only occupations” (Fielding, 1997: 38). After the war, however, the situation changed drastically. Women were once more *invited* to return to their former roles of housewife and mother. In relation to sports, some athletic events, like cricket, rugby and boxing remained practically inaccessible to women. The Football Association Council did not allow matches against “lady teams” for a long time and the resolution passed in 1921 banning “women from playing on their members’ pitches” was restated in 1946 and only cancelled in 1971 (Norridge, 2008: 178).



1948 Olympics Poster (4)

As far as the Paralympics are concerned, the British were fundamental to its creation. “In 1948 Dr Ludwig Guttman, who was treating war veterans for spinal injuries at Stoke Mandeville hospital near Aylesbury, began using sport as rehabilitation for his patients. To coincide with the London Olympics, he set up a competition with other hospitals. The idea caught on and in 1960, he took 400 wheelchair athletes to Rome to compete in the Olympic city. From that small start the Paralympics have mushroomed into the major sporting event attracting worldwide media attention that they are today” (ibid: 342). Despite the fact that the first Paralympics took place only some decades later (in Seoul in 1988) and accessibilities continued almost the same, the “achievement of the disabled sports movement was a remarkable success of post-war British sport” to which the inclusive State policy of the 1970’s, *Sport for All* contributed significantly (Holt and Mason, 2000:16).

Apparently, just as with the 1908 Olympiad, Great Britain was not the first choice for the 1948 Olympiads, though it had formerly been selected for the 1944 abandoned Games. Initially, the Games were to be allocated to Finland, but Helsinki had to decline the Games given the bad feeling and suffering from the aftermath of the war. Also analogous was the *timing*, even if the choice did not fall at such short notice as the 1908 Games, the circumstances under which Great Britain was committed to host a second Olympiad were much more difficult. In fact, according to Bill Henry, Lord Burgley, the Chairman of the London Games, was aware of British opinion which was not unanimously in support of the games²⁵ for after the great War the British were facing profound social, economical and political difficulties and changes, not to mention one of the worst bouts of weather ever to strike the country from end to end, in 1947.

Another similarity found was the results achieved by British athletes, who like other European athletes were still suffering from a violent war at home and did not have the facilities for training of American athletes. “America dominated as everyone knew they would” (Holt and Mason, 2000:32).

Big Ben, the famous clock tower of the Houses of Parliament, was chosen as the Olympic symbol. At 4 o’clock and with the agreement of the Olympic

²⁵ cf. History of the Olympic Games, p.270

Committee, this characteristic British icon set the Games off. The same old Big Ben that has witnessed and endured two world wars was shown as a symbol of a *leonine*, intrepid London and “her voice, as personified in Big Ben, has not been silenced, and it calls with courage a gallant welcome to some five thousand athletes and maybe a quarter-of-a-million of their followers’ (Phillips, 2007: 17). According to Phillips, the 1948 London Olympics greatly contributed to rescuing the Olympic Movement, and “signalled the recovery of sports, replaced on its peacetime pedestal” and asserted the essence of those Games as possibly the last plausibly amateur Olympics (Holt, 2000: 34).

Chapter 3

The British Campaign to host the 2012 Olympics



London Celebrations, July 2005 (5)

3.1. How the 2012 Games were won

London wins the paris²⁶

"The most important thing is building relationships. People do business with people. In business to win the hearts and minds of customers and clients you need to get to know them, they need to be able to trust you, they need to be able to like you. That's exactly the same in the bid. We have built a lot of credibility and personal relationships, and the fact is most IOC members have still not made their minds up. It really is these last few weeks, couple of months, that we have to get our message out to the people who will press the buttons in Singapore."

(Keith Mills in an interview given to *The Guardian*, April 2005)

The growing consciousness of internationalism of the Olympic Movement attracted worldwide attention after World War II, especially after Helsinki in 1952.

²⁶ This is a wordplay in which the plural form of the French term "pari" means either "challenge"/ "bet" or, in English idiom "the jackpot".

But there were other clouds on the horizon. A propos of this, Phillips cites Sándor Barcs when he wrote:

The meeting in Helsinki in 1952 marked a new era in the history of the Olympic Games – the epoch of giant Olympics, but it was certainly not in the way that de Coubertin had imagined it. The Helsinki Olympics far outgrew the significance of sports events. The Games became an international and a social matter. In fact, they were a world event, in which victory and not participation was the most important [sic]. As far as pure amateurism was concerned, perhaps that should not even be mentioned! Everyone behaved as if he did not know, but everybody knew, and everyone knew that the person he just happened to be speaking to also knew. So it is perhaps best not to broach the subject of amateurism. The important thing was that the participants all took the Olympic oath of amateurism, and the rest is best left unsaid (Phillips, 2007:328).

As pointed out before, the International Olympic Committee was composed of a somewhat aristocratic elite. Nothing much was to change here. According to Hoberman, by the end of the twentieth century (1995) the IOC members had remained very autonomous and went largely unsupervised. Political and financial opportunities, as well as “sanctuary” (immunity from expulsion), were given to a notable quantity of members in their homelands. In addition, many of its constituent members had had a past long engaged with “extreme right-wing” politics, even those on the International Olympic Committee, such as Samaranch²⁷. It is little wonder that the IOC sometimes showed *narrow-minded* attitudes towards people’s criticism. In 1967 Dr. Hollmann was severely censured when irreverently, yet perceptively, he foresaw the future of Olympic sport expressing the view that the ““Olympic idea” itself would inevitably fall victim to the logic of development inherent in the professionalization and commercialization of elite sport” (Hoberman, 1995:2-6).

²⁷ According to *The Times* online, Juan Antonio Samaranch (President of the International Olympic Committee for 21 years 1980-2001) was a controversial President of the Olympic movement who vastly increased the political influence and financial clout of the Games. Hoberman wrote that Samaranch “stood accused of political opportunism and fascist allegiances both during the Franco period and after the Generalissimo” (Hoberman, 1995:3).

Presently, almost half a century after Wildor Hollmann's words, the "professionalization and commercialization" of sport is a *fait accompli*. Consequently, holding the Olympic Games involves far more than a concern for "internationalism and social matters", and Olympic bids have become more aggressive in their presentational style. The 2012 Olympics, in particular, was a very demanding bidding procedure for all the countries involved, partly because a new and powerful phase in the competition for the Olympic Games had begun, and countless new key factors were involved. The economic, political, social, cultural and *mediatic* importance of the Olympic Games is recognised worldwide. As one of sport's mega-events (if not the largest), the Olympics always attract worldwide mass media coverage. The Olympic countries trying to host the Games have become increasingly aware of the significant growth in the revenues from the sale of TV broadcasting rights and interested in sponsorship by international companies. Additionally, as a large-scale international event, the Olympic Games signify a good opportunity and a chance to promote "the local host and a vehicle for the implementation of cultural policy strategies" as well as to attract tourism (Garcia, 2008: 361-376). Furthermore, being aware of the above-mentioned opportunities and returns, governments themselves have progressively been showing more interest and commitment to their countries' Olympic bids.

On 6 July 2005, the International Olympic Committee announced that London had been awarded the 2012 Olympic and Paralympics Games (Whannel, 2008:3). London will, therefore, become the first city to stage the summer Games on three distinct occasions i.e., 1908, 1948 and 2012. Strangely, as I mentioned above (cf. chapter 2), London had never before been successful in a bid for the Olympics until winning the 2012 Games. This time, however, London was fully committed to making a highly persuasive campaign and managed to win the bid amid competition from five outstanding cities: London, Paris, Madrid, New York and Moscow. As far as one can see, London was not the obvious choice of venue for the 2012 Olympics, and according to Whannel, the British were not expecting victory (Whannel, 2008:3-4). Nor did the British bidding team play fair on every occasion. Apart from being the third time London would host the Games, most of the other candidate cities had proved themselves to have similar projects and

facilities and had hosted the Olympics on one previous occasion only. Paris (1900 and 1924) was the only other candidate to have acted twice as the host city. Moreover, Paris could claim to have even better facilities than London (ibid: 165).

According to the press and online information²⁸, Paris had been the *odds-on favourite* since the bidding process began. Unexpectedly, the situation was radically altered and the French “front-runner” campaign was defeated in the final round of electronic voting by a mere four votes.

IOC's decision process in Singapore ²⁹				
Voting Results				
City	1st round	2nd round	3rd round	4th round
London	22	27	39	54
Paris	21	25	33	50
Madrid	20	32	31	
New York	19	16		
Moscow	15			

In the blink of an eye, a mere four votes destroyed two years of work by the Paris campaign. So, what mistakes were made by the French team? How did London emerge victorious in the 2012 Olympic bid? What was the deciding factor or factors which made the IOC award London the Games instead of the favourite Paris? Since 11 September 2001, the world has frantically searched for security and security measures are all the more important an issue when an event such as the Olympics is at stake. But Madrid on 11 March 2004 and London on 7 July 2005 suffered smaller, but also meaningful successions of the *Nine 11th*, which, however, did not apparently deter the IOC from choosing London. As far as the planning of the Games and finance are concerned, certainly all cities involved presented a well conceived organization plan. One is inclined to think then, that a

²⁸ Such sources as, BBC News; The Times online; The Guardian; The Independent; L'Expansion and Le Point.

²⁹ Source : http://www.gamesbids.com/eng/bid_archives.html#2012

reasonable explanation for the London bid to be favoured over the others probably relies on the *magic of the Games* as well as on “an enduring sporting legacy to future generations” promised by the British at the *Singapore Presentation speeches*.

Given the topicality of the theme as well as the range of national interests covered by the Olympics, it would be difficult to answer these questions with absolute certainty. However, it may not be idle to consider a few of the factors at play which led to a controversial and unexpected winning bid that had been in the making since 1997 and the consequent defeat of the favourite Paris. Soon, it became clear that the *demarches* of both capitals were radically opposed.

As a starting point, four factors can be highlighted as London’s most striking differences: the constitution of the bidding team, government and international support, the final presentation in Singapore and the overseas marketing campaign.

The talented and influential group of people gathered together to work on winning the Game were in place from the setting up of the entire bid. A key team of

influential people under the stewardship of Lord Coe³⁰, now Chairman Sebastian Coe, was formed and ultimately went on to succeed in Singapore. Sebastian Coe, one of Britain’s greatest athletes, was originally given the key role of special counsel to Barbara Cassani³¹, the American executive who was the technical specialist leading the bid. As London’s new bid leader, Coe’s job was to raise London’s profile on the international stage, since Paris was already ahead in the *bid marathon*. While the Paris



Sebastian Coe, 1984 Olympic gold (6)

bid was mainly fronted by politicians, sportsman Coe surrounded himself with sporting personalities and became a crucial public face for London, particularly

³⁰ Sebastian Coe is a double Olympic Champion who won Olympic gold in the 1500m in 1980 in Moscow and again in Los Angeles in 1984. He has also been elected to the influential council of athletics world governing body, the IAAF. Moreover, Coe had experience as an MP and adviser to William Hague, the former Tory leader.

³¹ American Barbara Cassani made her name as founder of the low-cost airline Go.

among IOC members. Nor can it be overlooked that Sebastian Coe was seen as having good political skills. The renowned French weekly magazine *Le Point* has also mentioned Coe's rather "mercenary" attitude, since he had even offered his services to Madrid. Interestingly, in 1980 Sebastian Coe objected publicly to Margaret Thatcher when she was campaigning to boycott the Moscow Olympics. At the time, Antonio Samaranch had just been appointed President of the IOC and Coe's gesture on behalf of the Games was much appreciated by Samaranch. Since then, their bonds of friendship were extended to the whole Samaranch family, including Juan Samaranch Jr., who presided over the Madrid 2012 bid. It would not be surprising then if the votes of the Spanish capital were transferred in large part to London. It has even been argued by the press (*The New York Times*, *L'Expansion*, and *Le Point*) that the handover of votes at the last moment was favourable to London, which inherited nearly a half of the votes that were supposed to go to Madrid. Equally influential were the entrepreneurial skills of Keith Mills,³² who was appointed as Chief Executive and international President of the London 2012 Olympic campaign and is joint deputy chairman of the Games' London Organising Committee. Since his appointment, "self-made man" Keith Mills, had been "involved in a far more refined information gathering process; assessing the voting intentions of the 124 members of the International Olympic Committee" and spending a week in April 2005 "lobbying IOC members in Berlin" (Kelso, 2005).



Keith Mills (7)

Furthermore, it was suggested that the London bid team had a budget of €20 million in "sweeteners" and other "freebies" for athletes and for national officials. It is little wonder that the IOC showed London at one point a yellow card for its deviousness. Indeed, *BBC Sport* later considered that "The key to London's

³² According to journalist Ali Hussain, Sir Keith Mills, best known for founding loyalty card schemes, such as Air Miles (in 1988) and Nectar, is a well-known entrepreneur and devotee of yacht racing. In 1999 Mills was one of the crew that won the Clipper Round the World Yacht Race. In 2006, he was appointed a non-executive director of Tottenham Hotspur FC.
Source: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/money/investment/article6831849.ece>

victory was the appointment of sportsman Seb Coe to lead the bid and businessman Keith Mills to market it internationally. Although the bid was slapped on the wrist by the IOC for being a bit too aggressive at times - the strategy paid off.”³³ To keep the ball rolling, the British Olympic Association was to make sure of the government’s support. Since its inception, there were many initiatives and efforts to rally support from all fields of society but especially from the government. The Olympics Minister Tessa Jowell’s “London 2012 Olympics statement to the House of Commons” illustrated quite well her intentions of mobilizing other British politicians.

Mr Speaker, I am delighted to be able to inform the House that following the discussion at Cabinet today Government has decided to give its wholehearted backing to a bid to host the Olympic Games and the Paralympics in London in 2012. He has told Mr Rogge that Government will back to the hilt the efforts of the BOA, alongside the GLA, LDA and others.

The Bid will be a huge stimulus for elite sport – Lottery investment in our athletes helped us to our best medal haul for decades at Sydney; a London bid allows us to build on that and raise standards even higher. But our Olympic Bid will also rest on a growing commitment to grassroots sport. It will be central to our efforts to increase physical activity, and identify and develop talent. We want to harness the power of sport to help address some of the key issues our nation faces – health, social inclusion, educational motivation and fighting crime. We want the Olympics to be the catalyst that inspires people of all ages and all talents to lead more active lives (Jowell, 2003).³⁴

The bid team soon managed to obtain the “total political support” of Prime Minister Tony Blair, of Mayor Ken Livingstone as well as the Royal family’s backing, as demonstrated in the final presentation in Singapore. Afterwards, Tessa Jowell started a journey around the country trying hard to persuade people to back the London 2012 bid, convincing key figures from business, the arts and ethnic minority communities that a London Olympics would have benefits well beyond the capital. The London Olympics 2012 would be “a huge opportunity for people in the

³³ Source : http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/sport2/hi/front_page/4655555.stm

³⁴ Source : http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_Library/minister_speeches/2103.aspx#

Midlands, across England, and in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland”, “with very real benefits for “all – economic, social and sporting” (Jowell, 2003). It would furthermore mean the unity of the nation (a somewhat more contentious point). At this point, Paris had had its task facilitated. France had long been united around their 2012 Olympics bid.

British pro-activism advanced on all fronts. Sebastian Coe managed to attract the support of international figures such as David Beckham “and a host of sporting celebrities” who, according to Mark Olivier



Prime Minister Tony Blair, 2005 (8)

“have been in Singapore pressing for a London games.”³⁵ Nelson Mandela, whose influence in Anglophone Africa is known to be predominant, was another winning card played on behalf of Coe’s *cause célèbre*. The 1993 Nobel Peace Prize winner Nelson Mandela, who became an outstanding symbol of resistance as the imprisoned leader of the anti-apartheid movement, declared his backing for the London Games in 2005. Mandela’s endorsement was important as he lent the bid his personal integrity and great political courage which enjoys unrivalled standing and recognition across the world. Mandela’s announcement also reflected the close ties between British and South African sport. The British Football Association were also big supporters of South Africa’s successful 2010 World Cup bid, sending out the England team to help with the campaign, and there was also a Memorandum of Understanding between both countries about developing sporting links. And this is not to mention the admiration for London professed by Mandela: “There is no city like London. London is a wonderfully diverse and open city providing a home to hundreds of different nationalities from all over the world. I can’t think of a better place than London to hold an event that unites the world.”³⁶

³⁵ Source : <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2005/jul/06/olympics2012.olympicgames1>

³⁶ Source : <http://www.uk sport.gov.uk/news/2042/>

Another major distinction between the Paris and London bids reflects the competences deployed to showcase both Olympic projects. Paris presented a political project, as was made clear by the commitment of the main political parties, unions and businessmen. Luc Besson's expensive campaign film (costing 7 million Euros), was considered *a piece of art*, "with an aerial tour of the city and Olympic rings floating around its landmarks". Besson created a beautiful, non-commercial film that seemed to address and satisfy politicians and officials rather than considering athletes. The French delegation was largely composed of political figures, essentially members of its political and social elite. Equally important was that the French seemed to forget that the *last card* was to be played in Singapore, a former British colony. Jacques Chirac spent a brief day in Singapore and actually took part in the French capital's final presentation on 6 July 2005, "while Tony Blair opted to lobby alongside the London bid team in Singapore before flying back to Britain to host the G8 summit."³⁷ Once again, it seems that Aesop's fable *The Tortoise and the Hare* fits quite well here. Not that the French acted too fast or carelessly, but possibly Paris was over-confident of winning, so the French slowed down their efforts towards the end of the *bidding race*.

On the winning side, British politicians and trade unions stayed in the shadows for the most part. On 6 July 2005, the London 2012 delegation, presciently, included thirty young people from the future Olympic site, east London and London's other poorer districts, among them sporting personalities such as David Beckham, Denise Lewis³⁸, and Amber Charles³⁹. In Singapore, London 2012's "magic vision for a Games to inspire the youth of the world" was presented. In a forty-five minute presentation, there were seven speakers, five video sections and a clear theme: "London 2012 – creating sporting opportunities for the youth of the world". The bid's Chairman, Lord Coe told his personal story of being inspired as a twelve-year old watching the 1968 Mexico Olympics. It had a poignant and emotional appeal. Coe stressed that in the London's delegation there was not a politician, nor a businessman, but youngsters aged 12 to 18 whose origins are the

³⁷ Source : http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/sport2/hi/front_page/4655555.stm

³⁸ Olympic Heptathlon Champion from Sydney Games

³⁹ Amber Charles is a basketball player who, according to Sebastian Coe, represents the future generations.

“multi-cultural mix” from east London. Lord Coe also revealed his ambition to take his love of sport to all the youngsters of the world whatever their colour, religion, sexual orientation or able-bodiedness and he hoped to accomplish this through the London 2012 Games. Accordingly, the British film, directed by Daryl Goodrich,⁴⁰ was a showcase of *united colours*, diversity and iconic places, contrasting with the French film in which, although addressing de Coubertin ideals, white faces largely prevailed – which was ill-advised, since Paris has a large cosmopolitan heritage too and has always been a city that embraced all the *colours*.⁴¹ As already shown, the London team was a powerful and astute one, backed by influential figures and, most of all, never gave up on or took for granted the dream of winning the world’s most prestigious sporting event. Notwithstanding this, the London bid wouldn’t have succeeded without Mills’ powerful overseas marketing campaign. As put by the Spaniard Moragas (2001), quoted by Beatriz Garcia,

in order to ‘win the Games’ it is necessary to start by appropriately interpreting its cultural dimension. This interpretation requires the development of [five] fundamental axis: (1) know how to define and interpret the event—the Olympic Games—understand it as a cultural phenomenon; (2) find the appropriate position for the local and global audience of the event; (3) develop a cultural programme that defines the host-city identity – ceremonies, Cultural Olympiad, street celebrations;(4) establish a communication policy, in particular in regards to television; (5) new challenges in the Internet era (Garcia, 2008:364).

In the era of the *global screen*, the man who established this important communication “policy, in particular in regard to television” and the “new challenges in the Internet era” was Mike Lee. The Rt. Hon. Mike Lee was responsible for setting the stage for the London bid as Director of Communications and Public Affairs during the campaign and for trying to secure the Olympics for the city. According to *The Times*, Mike Lee had previously worked as a senior

⁴⁰ ‘Goodrich’s producer, Caroline Rowland, was certain of London’s victory. “Look,” she says, metaphorically rolling up her sleeves, “Paris has had a lot of practice, yes. They’ve done it twice before. But you can see it another way: I’m sure they’re pretty worn out, flogging the same things again and again.” (<http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/film/article-19342688-the-olympic-film-makers.do>)

⁴¹Source: http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport2/hi/olympic_games/london_2012/7577999.stm

adviser to the MP and sometime Home Secretary David Blunkett and as Director of Communications and Public Affairs for UEFA. This “spin doctor” joined Lord Coe and his team as coordinator of all external relations and campaign elements of the bid. Mike Lee “co-chaired the creative team, led the international media and on-line campaign, and was special adviser to bid chair Lord Sebastian Coe.” Curiously enough, Lee “was also the lead advisor to the successful Rio 2016 Olympic Bid, devising the overall campaign and communications strategy that helped Rio win.”⁴² It is not surprising then to read what was written in *Le Point*, about “le diabolique Mike Lee.” According to the French article “Du rêve au fiasco”⁴³, this “wise old fox” had and knew how to use his “killer instincts” admirably and did not refrain from using them. He knew that in order to succeed he would have not only to praise the merits of the British, but also to destroy the merits of the French bid, exposing French frailties. When under attack, the Paris Mayor, Bertrand Delanoë just answered “that his city would not get into a war of words with London.” “On our part, it will be fair play throughout,” he said. “We will not be belittling the others. We have no comment on other bids because that’s the rules of the IOC and that’s the Olympic spirit.” Once again, though Mike Lee was not playing by the rules, the French failed in their struggle since their marketing campaign was less aggressive and (astonishingly) largely meant for home consumption. Additionally, Tony Blair and Jacques Chirac’s diplomatic relations had been deteriorating since the Iraq war and came to a head shortly before Paris and London faced off in Singapore. President Chirac’s less than diplomatic observations about the “British contribution to the European Union”, “mad cow disease and awful British cooking” were not much help in Anglo-French relations.⁴⁴

At the signing of the Host City Contract, the IOC President, Jacques Rogge, congratulated the London team on winning the vote, and praised the high quality of their bidding portfolio and final presentation saying: “I am delighted to see that many of the London representatives have had a long journey in the Olympic Games. I remember when I met Sebastian Coe in the Olympic Village in Moscow

⁴²Source:<http://www.london2012.com/press/media-releases/bid-phase/london-appoints-director-of-communications-and-public-af.php>

⁴³ My translation: “From dream to flop” (*Le Point*.)

⁴⁴Sources:<http://www.lepoint.fr/actualites-societe/2007-01-17/jo-2012-du-reve-aufiasco/920/0/20240>; http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/sport/olympics/london_2012/article540311.ece

in 1980, just after he had won his gold medal. Who would have thought that we would be where we are today. I congratulate London for their inspiring project and look forward to collaborating with them over the next seven years” (Rogge, 2006).

In conclusion, and as far as the London bid is concerned, Chairman Coe’s campaign seemed to be inspired by the American Avery Brundage⁴⁵ who believed that “The Olympic Games must not be an end in itself; they must be a means of creating a vast programme of physical education and sports competitions for all young people.” The British bid was focussed on a legacy for future generations – a lasting sporting legacy taken up and supported by politicians as well as by sporting personalities. During the crucial phases of the bidding campaign, the British *blazeratti*, with their patrician espousal of *fair play*, remained little more than an out-of-date myth. Keith Mills, “a self-made man”, the “son of a Brentwood factory worker” who “left school aged 15”⁴⁶ embodied a more American, more entrepreneurial, more aggressive kind of sports administrator, and that was partly the reason why the bid campaign was successful. It was not all politics or all conspiracies. Nevertheless, some questions will inevitably remain unanswered and some dealings behind the scenes of the Olympic Games Campaign⁴⁷ will always be obscure. One thing is clear, London got most of New York’s votes and that would seem to be due to *natural* long-standing historical allegiances, which also explain other instances of, as the cliché is, *standing shoulder to shoulder*, like the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The XXX Olympiad is supposed to provide the United Kingdom with the opportunity to boost the standard of sporting achievement amongst its elite athletes, as well as improving the general involvement of ordinary people. Whether the London 2012 Olympic Games will give sport in Britain a boost and provide a legacy for future generations can only be analyzed in the years to come. The object of this study is the campaign and its representation of London in the first instance and then of Britain. Up till now, this has all been promises. The first dose of harsh reality was the world-wide recession in 2007/2008 which has put London

⁴⁵ International Olympic Committee’s President from 1952 to 1972.

⁴⁶ Source: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2005/apr/23/olympics2012.Olympics2012>

⁴⁷ Mike Lee has already written a book about the 2012 Olympic Campaign - *The Race for the 2012 Olympics* (2006).

in a much worse position to carry them out. In May 2010, the new Conservative-Liberal coalition government announced that it was making a cut of 27 million pounds on the Olympics budget for this year. More cuts are expected to follow in 2011 and 2012. Albeit the *grey clouds* over the current socio-political period, the previous London Olympics have shown the tenacity and organizational skills of the British. Therefore, the study about the “economic benefits in staging world sports events” carried out by UK Sport can be seen as an optimistic indication to London 2012 Olympics. According to reporter Mihir Bose, “UK sport analysed data from 16 world and European sporting events held in the UK between 1997 and 2003 and came to the conclusion that for every £1 of National Lottery funding invested in staging these events, a return of just over £7 of economic impact is recorded, that is, additional spending in the local community. UK Sport distributes £1.6 million of Lottery funding per year towards these staging costs” (Bose, 2008).⁴⁸

3.2. Iconicity in the 'London 2012 Presentation at the 2008 Beijing Olympics'

‘Unity, not uniformity, must be our aim. We attain unity through variety.
Differences must be integrated, not annihilated, not absorbed.’

Mary Parker Follet (1868-1933)

The London 2012 Olympics are going to be the first Games to be held after the powerful and impressively well-organized 2008 Beijing Games. Given the proper distance, historical circumstances and purposes, and at the risk of being too radical, I would venture to suggest a similarity between the strict organizational levels of the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the 1936 Games in Berlin. As put by Phillips when



Big Ben, 2005 (9)

⁴⁸ Source : <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/othersports/olympics/2383579/New-study-to-boost-bid-hopes.html>

writing about 1948 London Olympics,

To understand how London was favoured it is necessary to appreciate that at its beginning there was a very definite sense of protocol, rather than preferential treatment, about the selection process. Memories were all too fresh of the 1936 Games in Berlin where Hitler and his cohorts had strutted and blustered in vain in search of “Aryan supremacy”, and though the Germans had won more medals than anyone else they had been firmly put in their place in the Olympic Stadium by the marvellous achievements of an Afro-American athlete named Jesse Owens. It was the relentless flag-waving and hideous chanting which left a deeply scarring impression (Phillips, 2007:2).

As we have seen, the 2012 Olympics bidding campaign was one of the most troubled and demanding ones and, this time, London had to compete with other equally prestigious cities. Perhaps there was a predisposition towards the British bid which was aided by a powerful - not always even-handed - marketing campaign; nevertheless, the British have shown that *magic* could happen when efforts are combined with persistence and, definitely, with their close relations with their media stakeholders. All through the various phases of the bid and even in Singapore, the London team provided a set of selected images in order to promote both the London 2012 Olympics and the British capital itself – both domestically and internationally. Michael Wintle argues that “Most images used for official purposes are a form of theatre rather than reality, and ‘documentary’ pictures invariably have an agenda or moral aspiration. Images show us contemporary views of things rather than reality (...) and the fine arts provide powerful visual representations of the nation” (Wintle, 2008:224). Thus, according to Berkaak and Garcia, such a promotional event as the Olympiads involves a careful selection of “values and symbols” to represent “the host culture to the world”. Accordingly, the London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games’ (LOCOG) aim was to “summarise the political and cultural personality of “the British” so as to be appreciated by locals and “easy to understand by foreigners.” Bearing in mind that interpretations (or misunderstandings) on the part of the global media are unavoidable in the diffusion of the host country’s socio-cultural image, the

organizers tended to concentrate all their efforts on identifying the most suitable signs “for audio-visual expression.”

As put by Moragas:

the question is to synthesise a complex reality in an image consisting of the adequate attributes [...] All cultures own some “brand images” resulting from history, prior tourist promotional strategies or the universal success of some of its more representative features. However the celebration of the Olympic Games also represents an historic opportunity to reconstruct and renovate certain pertinent characteristics [which may be out-dated] or have resulted from situations of politico-cultural domination (Moragas, 1992: 32 cited by Garcia, 2008: 362-363).

Significantly, the London Olympic team was surrounded by advertising experts, given that the strategies to promote a city internationally, “share similar” characteristics to the promotion of “films, songs or tourist offers” (ibid: 363). After Beijing’s superb 2008 Olympic Games, what would be the right and proper attitude of the London Organising Committee concerning the London 2012 Presentation to the Chinese and to the world? Indeed, what could London offer that Beijing could not?

The London Presentation during the 2008 Beijing Olympics Closing Ceremony was an attempt to showcase a particular chosen set of London icons, meant not only to present a respectful and also a humble Britain, but essentially, if I may say so, to *advertise* and *sell* London on a human scale. This was naturally a contrast with the hyperbole and extravagant self-promotion of the *perfect* Chinese games. Therefore, it is necessary to make a list of the icons showcased during the London 2012 Presentation.

Table 1- Icons in 'London 2012 Presentation in Beijing Olympics'⁴⁹

Icons in the film "This is London" and staged at the National Stadium, Beijing	
Monuments / Places History, Tradition and Modernity	The Houses of Parliament and Big Ben (Central London) Buckingham Palace (Central London) / HRH-His /Her Royal Highness) London Eye (Central London) 30 St Mary Axe, The Gherkin (the City of London) Earl's Court (West London) South Kensington (West London) The Tate Modern / Tate Gallery
Transports Cultural habits and behaviour	Red double-decker Bus Bus Stop Queuing /Newspaper/ Umbrellas Lollipop lady - a school crossing patrol officer Zebra crossing / pedestrian crossing London black cab Bicycles (Brompton Bike) / Cyclists Underground /Tube map
Values / attitudes	Pluriculturalism Integration (multiethnic, multi-aged, able and disabled, multi-instrumental, multi-fashion) Respect for the rule Tolerance and respect for others Mutual help Politeness Environmental concern
Objects	Tube map Red telephone Box / Kiosk Newspaper Umbrellas Football
Pop / Youth Culture (Music, Fashion, Dance, Sport)	Young people Punks Jimmy Page and Leona Lewis David Beckham Olympian cyclists Dancers (classic, contemporary, street dancers, disabled, non-disabled)

⁴⁹ Sources: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yz47ZQIBwmQ&feature=related>
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1dRNJ__plh4
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZ3FMB0aan8>

The above table illustrates virtually all of the icons and *signs of identity* found in the London Presentation in the 2008 Beijing Olympics. On the left, icons are categorised according to my general perception of the event. On the right, there is a list of icons which appeared either during the film preceding the camera's focus on the Bird's Nest stadium, or shown later on stage. These icons



Philip Sheppard (10)



Stephen Powell (11)

cover a wide range of signs usually associated with London and go from history and politics to more commonly and internationally known people such as footballers and singers. Before analysing the contents of the table, it seems pertinent to address the creative team behind such an important event. The creative director responsible for the London Presentation in Beijing 2008 was Stephen Powell. Stephen Powell is well-known among the British media⁵⁰, and at the time he was given the post of creative director for this presentation, he had already achieved a considerable (and at times controversial) reputation as a producer, director and writer.⁵¹ Equally important is the rich evocative score for the short film, *This is London*. It was purpose-written and produced for the Olympic Handover Ceremony and the young composer commissioned to write and produce the music was Philip Sheppard⁵², who, not surprisingly, specialises in film and

⁵⁰ "Stephen has worked for the Royal Shakespeare Company and Royal National Theatre. He devised, co-wrote and produced 'The Manchester Passion', a major live event broadcast for BBC last year. He has won a number of awards for his work, including a Rose D'Or at the Golden Rose Television Festival and several Royal Television Society awards."(<http://www.london2012.com/news/2007/11/creative-director-appointed.php>)

⁵¹ Source: http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/sport/columnists/giles_smith/article5847573.ece

⁵² Philip Sheppard is a professor at the Royal Academy of Music, a contemporary composer as well as a solo cellist. He also wrote the eight minute sequence for the Paralympics Handover ceremony. (<http://philipsheppard.com/about/>)

television soundtracks. *This is London* was performed by the London Symphony Orchestra and presented a delightful melodic opening for London's eight-minute segment. A new version of the UK National Anthem was also commissioned for Sheppard to arrange. This is what he had to say about it: "It's symphonic and full-on but a bit different. I did not think we should go to China and do something imperial and militaristic, I wanted it to be more sentimental so the British athletes in the stadium could feel nostalgic and start fantasising about Marmite and cups of tea" (O'Connor: 2008).⁵³ For someone who did not wish to sound imperialistic, he certainly succeeded in making it nostalgically English.

As for the London Presentation, the short *slide show-style* film starts by presenting London 2012 modern, rather stylised Olympics Logo. The camera goes through the city spaces showing striking contrasts. Old iconic monuments, symbols of imperial Britain, stand alongside contemporary buildings and places, symbols of modernity.

The Houses of Parliament and Big Ben can be seen as symbols of British determination, for they are known to have survived a damaging fire in 1834, new buildings were designed and erected between 1840 and 1867, and following the destruction of the Blitz, the House of Commons was built again in exactly the same style. Also in central London, Buckingham Palace, built in 1703, remains one of the major tourist attractions. A spiky-haired, brightly coloured punk *stands on* the roof of Buckingham Palace defiantly pointing out to the world. Punks have been *magnets for tourists* and also a focus for projecting local counter-culture, after the late 1970s. Still, it is ironic that once assumed as an anti-establishment and rebelliousness movement, the London 2012 creative team has used punks, as one of the icons representing London and Britain (Colegrave & Sullivan, 2001: 290-1). But, it would seem to be that the royal family, despite all the troubles, especially after Diana's death, still has a preeminent position amongst British icons. The United Kingdom's Head of State remains the strongest of icons and her image is preserved on all stamps and currency. The London Eye or the Millennium Wheel located on the South Bank of the Thames just below Westminster brings a twenty-first century twist. This modern tourist icon has

⁵³Source:<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/sport/olympics/article4592988.ece>

become the most popular paid tourist attraction in the United Kingdom and it was visited by “over three million people in one year”.⁵⁴ The Millennium Wheel is not the only modern piece of London’s architecture showcased. The modern scene included 30 St Mary Axe, best known as the Gherkin and the Tate Modern. This contemporary and still controversial skyscraper, the Gherkin, designed by Foster and Partners and inaugurated in 2004 is situated in the capital’s main financial district, the City of London (Brown, 2007:3). The message which the film is trying to get across to the world is clear: Britain is not stuck in the past; the British are looking ahead and still have something to offer in terms of modern engineering and the arts, as evidenced by the precious collection of international modern art from 1900 to the present exhibited in the Tate Modern. The short film also nods to West London tourist areas, such as Earl’s Court with its handful of small hotels and South Kensington’s museums, foreign embassies and well-known fashionable and expensive houses, shops and restaurants. Once again the invitation is obvious: London is an unmissable destination: Come and enjoy it!



London 2012 bus (12)

More intense is the message expressed by the icons related with means of transport, as suggested by their insertion both in the film and on the Beijing stage. We are presented with several transport-related icons that seek to show a particular concern with current issues, such as the environment and sustainable

⁵⁴ The London Eye was designed by architects David Marks, Josvoll Oslo, Malcolm Cook, Mark Sparrowhawk, Steven Chilton, Frank Anatole and Nic Bailey, and remains as the largest Ferris wheel in Europe. Source: <http://www.londoneye.com/>

development, as well as the cultural habits and behaviour of an increasingly pluricultural and multi-ethnic London. In fact, the London bid did not drift from the central environmental sustainability concern that the planned £18 billion transport infrastructure project represents.⁵⁵ The double-decker bus and the icons associated with it (bus stops, queuing, lollipop lady, zebra crossing) act as an attempt to draw the world's attention to virtually the same cultural values advertised in the 1950's *Journey by a London Bus*, referred to in the second chapter. Apparently, the aim then and now is to paint an "adequate picture of British institutions and the British way of life for external consumption" and at the same time to maintain old traditions, which, once again may be a paradox in view of Phillip Sheppard's wish for a non-imperialistic (re)presentation of London. However, traditions are not always compatible with economic and safety interests, and the old Routemaster Bus - introduced in 1956 with its revolutionary looks - was withdrawn from London streets in 2005.⁵⁶ Zebra crossings, however, with their Belisha Beacons, continue their job around the UK of helping to save lives. Insisting on showing zebra crossings seems both a cheeky nod to the *Beatles* famous album *Abbey Road* (1969), a clear allusion to its familiarity all over the world and a recollection of the British contribution in the area of road safety. As mentioned by Ishaque & Noland "By the end of the 1940's there were over 30,000 crossings in all Britain. Driver observance and pedestrian usage was low. In 1951 the number of pedestrian crossings was reduced by two-thirds and the road surface at the crossing was stripped (zebra crossing). Pedestrians were to have precedence over vehicles at these crossings. Zebra-crossings resulted in a reduction in pedestrian casualties and remain an important feature of urban road infrastructure in Britain to this day."⁵⁷ It is worth mentioning that the first pedestrian crossing signal was erected in London in 1868.

Supposedly, the London Olympics creative team wanted to underline the appealing importance of affordable and easy mobility in the British transport system. The colourful lines that easily identify the London Underground are also

⁵⁵ Source: <http://www.london2012.com/publications/london-2012-sustainability-plan-summary.php>

⁵⁶ As it proved to be an unpopular move, London's Mayor, Boris Johnson, has promised a new Routemaster bus prototype by 2011 and parts of the 9 & 15 routes have Routemasters running on them as Heritage routes". (<http://www.routemaster-bus.org.uk/>)

⁵⁷ Source: <http://www.cts.cv.imperial.ac.uk/html/Poster/Poster.asp?page=1>

shown as a further attraction of the English capital. The first Underground map in diagrammatic form, devised by Harry Beck in 1933, is shown not only as an icon but also as a milestone in London Underground history and transport.⁵⁸ The same can be suggested about the London black cab. The first black cab model, the Austin FX-4 “went into service in 1959 and remained in production until 1997, making it one of the longest running production vehicles in history”⁵⁹ and also an important vestige of a past when Britain had high levels of national productivity in heavy engineering, something which is no longer the case. Then, bicycles come out of nowhere, looking quite a provocative gesture when one reflects that they are appearing in “the kingdom of bicycles” as China was once known for having 500 million bikers on the streets.⁶⁰ The *bike show* of cycling gold medallists Chris Hoy, Victoria Pendleton and Jamie Staff, all dressed up to look like typical London cycling commuters is, however, an advertising charm operation. Strategically, the people are seen riding different bicycles, the Brompton model being a London-made product, used by environmentally friendly people who may even wear a suit and tie.⁶¹ According to Norridge, “Britain had a lot of influence over the development of cycling as a sport but it was the French who actually started it.” Moreover, it was a Scottish vet named John Boyd Dunlop who “developed the first pneumatic tyre, which made cycling much more comfortable and much more popular”. It is not surprising that the British are promoting the bicycle as a modern icon, since lately “the British team has established itself as one of the major forces – if not the major force – in track cycling. In the Beijing Olympics of 2008, they won seven out of the available ten gold medals” (Norridge, 2008: 402-406).

⁵⁸ Source:<http://www.tfl.gov.uk/corporate/modesoftransport/londonunderground/1604.aspx>

⁵⁹ Source: <http://www.londonblackcabs.co.uk/About.html>.

⁶⁰ Source:http://www.china.org.cn/environment/2010-01/24/content_19296956.htm

⁶¹ The Brompton is a hand-made foldable bicycle invented by the English engineer Andrew Ritchie “It has created a completely new market segment by providing a well-designed, fun to ride and easy to transport bicycle”. Brompton Bicycle owes its name to Andrew's bedroom overlooking the Brompton Oratory in London. Source:<http://www.brompton.co.uk/page.asp?p=3085>

Additionally, Boris Johnson, the Mayor of London, has made a very positive contribution to the establishment of bicycles as fashionable and environmentally friendly means of transport. In an article published in July 2009, the Mayor said: "Cycling is one of the greenest, handiest, and most enjoyable ways of getting about. No one can bother you on your mobile or Blackberry, and Bob Crow [transport trade union leader] can't stop you from getting to work. My current bike is a Marin Fairfax, which has served me very well. I do hope more people take to two wheels, that's why we're pumping £111m into cycling in London this year" (Johnson, 2009).⁶²



Boris Johnson (13)

The London 2012 presentation seems to have aimed at asserting the difference between what the British have to offer as an alternative and stark contrast to the synchronised display of the Chinese. As Garcia put it:

The showcase of the country's *folklore and cultural diversity* was a fundamental factor in the design of (...) Beijing 2008 and is linked to a deeper political agenda of national pride in the country's heritage. (...) Finally, the objective to achieve a change of image has been key in the cultural agenda of cities such as Munich, Seoul and Beijing, all of them cities within countries with a marked military past (Munich was still somehow associated with Nazi Germany in 1972) aspiring to transform international stereotypes (Garcia, 2008: 361- 376).

The London 2012 Presentation was guided by "unity, not uniformity". This "unity" is represented as a boost to creativity and tolerance, and, consequently, leads to a satisfactory integration of differences. In fact, the *combination* of different dancing companies –The Royal Opera House; Zoo Nation (a street dance

⁶²Sources: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7376621.stm>; <http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2009/jul/26/cycling-alan-bennett-boris-johnson>

theatre group) and London's CandoCo Dance Company⁶³ is a clear response to this effort, even if for only eight minutes.

What the world saw in the Closing Ceremony in Beijing seems to point to a palpable contrast between two cultures, a democratic one, where individuals are accepted regardless of origin, ability or social background and a dictatorial one where individualism and homogeneity are sacrificed in favour of the collective greater national good. London and their multicultural inhabitants and tourists make the difference. Everything in the Chinese performance was immense and solemn. As such, the lively London 2012 Presentation in Beijing was a valuable idiosyncratic performance on a human scale, a showcase of integration but not of tangible grandeur, where all types of differences were not annihilated but included. This performance, as well as the short film, when analysed as a form of multi-media, "reflect the current state of affairs – sometimes in a somewhat distorted manner – but they also exert their own independent influence. The artists, designers, architects and cartoonists who devised, developed and perpetuated these images were reflecting current trends, but they were also generating them, in the way that the mass media does today, in particular television" (Wintle, 2008: 243).

Finally, the London Presentation in Beijing, despite the strictness of time allocated (eight minutes), was aimed at conveying traditional "values and identity signs that can assist in promoting the host city's cultural policy choices among international media" (Garcia, 2008: 362-3). Many of these values had to be inferred from the performance staged in the Bird's Nest. On a closer analysis, all these values and identity signs appear before the viewers' eyes. Pluriculturalism and inclusiveness can be inferred from the waving figures represented, as well as from the performers' easy and equal interactions on stage. A multiethnic, multi-aged, multi-instrumental, multi-faceted and multi-able (that is, including able and disabled) group dance, apparently ramshackle but in fact united. Dancers join together, queuing, while waiting for the London double-decker bus. Every one respects his/her place in the queue, dances next to the bus stop, weaving in and

⁶³ CandoCo is a contemporary group dance engaging disabled choreographers, disabled and non-disabled dancers.

out of the line without pushing in or jostling the other citizens. Three different bikers riding three different bicycle models arrive at the National Stadium and pass by the waiting passengers waving their hands in a show of staged cheeriness. The cyclists move away and the cameras focus on two wheelchairs - young men who wait together with the other passengers. A Lollipop Lady patiently leads Tayyibe Dudhwala by the hand crossing the zebra crossing to meet a Chinese girl who hands Tayyibe a ball in a clear symbolization of the handover of the Games. With a newspaper, a colourful broly (or a black Brigs) in his/her hands, the carefully contrived multi-fashion group helps a nine-year-old girl from East London get onto the London 2012 red bus. The scene looks as if the older generations are helping the younger ones to welcome the extraordinary, “lasting sporting, cultural and community legacy”⁶⁴ of the Olympic Games, even if we know this contrived street theatre (on an imaginary street) to be a marketing strategy, rather than a characteristic of Britain, or indeed, of any country that has arrived at the beginning of the 21st century through processes of social change and adaptation that are rarely smooth and conflict-free.



Leona Lewis and Jimmy Page (14)

Afterwards, the film continues its marketing objective with the London double-decker bus improbably opening up its roof and transforming into a green stage onto which two international English music stars emerge: Jimmy Page and

⁶⁴Source: <http://www.london2012.com/about-us/the-people-delivering-the-games/the-olympic-delivery-authority/oda-priority-themes/legacy.php>

Leona Lewis. As a producer, composer and outstanding guitarist, Jimmy Page helped make Led Zeppelin an internationally famous rock'n'roll band of the 1970s⁶⁵ but he was not a consensual choice for this event. The overture of the new version of Led Zeppelin's legendary *Whole Lotta Love*, featuring Jimmy Page and Leona Lewis, was also co-produced by Philip Sheppard (together with Steve Robson, Page and Lewis). A mix of classical music - with a string trio of guitar, violin and cello - with pop/rock is then performed showing, in Sheppard's words, his version of an "irrepressibly British" moment, a spontaneous jamming together session. On the one hand, in an increasingly globalised world, music tendencies are gradually becoming more alike. On the other hand, according to Philip Bohlman, music is "fundamentally non-representational. And yet, the relationship between music and nationalism has been a very powerful one. Music gave voice to a wide variety of national struggles. National musical styles strengthened national allegiances, as musical styles were interpreted as giving expression to national characters" (Bohlman, 2008:11). For many, Led Zeppelin was the angry sound of the counter-culture, whose scions (Bill Clinton, Tony Blair, drink and drug-using George W. Bush, among others) were later to become key establishment figures.

Sports, in contrast, mostly because of the media growing interest in the 1990s, have greatly contributed to generating new national icons. "A celebrity cult around top players" (Holt & Mason, 2000: 173) has made some sporting figures worldwide stars and they are now seen as role models as well as focuses of national pride. As such, David Beckham was chosen, not only to represent the London 2012 Campaign, but also to make a star appearance in the National Stadium as a British glamour icon. In



Beckham and musicians (15)

⁶⁵ Known as a guitar hero with Led Zeppelin in the 1970s, Page career went into decline in the 1980s with heroin addiction but he returned a musical partnership with Robert Plant in the 1990's. Ever since, Page has been involved in charity concerts and in 2005, he was awarded the Order of the British Empire and a Grammy award for his services to the music industry. He was also awarded a honouree doctorate by the University of Surrey on June 2008.

fact, when the football star emerges from the modern red double-decker bus, the euphoria of universal recognition breaks out among the audience. David Beckham's gift of a football is kicked out into the audience and grabbed by a lucky Chinese Olympic volunteer whose happiness the cameras fall over themselves to show. The London 2012 bus sets off on the road again as if it was continuing the summer tour started in 1963 in a Routemaster bus by the British pop star Cliff Richard in the film *Summer Holiday* (1963).

Did the strategy of the London 2012 Presentation pay off? According to Giles Smith, Martin Green, the London Olympics event's producer said that they wanted "to tell a very contemporary story of where we are as a city now."⁶⁶ Thus, as the present analysis shows, the eight-minute London Presentation in Beijing was a story used to channel and influence public opinion, rather than simply to reflect the current state of London city. On a closer inspection, it is more complex than one might have expected, but it is nonetheless the brainchild of a marketing strategy, conceived and made by advertising experts, who sell London as they would sell any other product, knowing that celebrity and politically correct gestures sell and make the film effective. Thus, White's⁶⁷ view of "Think globally, act locally" (Jones, 2000: 30) seems to fit perfectly London's 2012 Presentation since its creative team tried to adapt international concepts and iconic stars, such as David Beckham or Leonna Lewis, to "local conditions". Therefore, the marketers' aim was to look for "*similarities*" not for "*differences*," as the target was to reach an international market. The argument seems to be that of: if one is familiar with a 'product' one can more easily identify oneself with it and, consequently, will more readily buy it (Jones, 2000: 32-3). So, even if icons presented in Beijing look simplistic and do not represent as complex a thing as a nation like Britain or a city like London, they are fashionable and recognisable worldwide and, as a result, they are expected to appeal to a huge number of people around the world.

⁶⁶ Source: http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/sport/columnists/giles_smith/article5847573.ece

⁶⁷ Roderick White is a graduate of Oxford University and an expert in the areas of advertising and marketing internationally.

Final Considerations

Watched every four years by billions of people worldwide, the Olympics are much more than the world's largest regularly scheduled sporting event; they are an international political and economic colossus. The motto *Citius, Altius, Fortius* now applies as much to the promotion of and financial and political commitment to the games as to the athletes' performances. As the Beijing Closing Ceremony showed, the next city to host the Games immediately presents its promotional package involving a film and on-stage presentation in a strategically planned marketing campaign. In order to make it effective, one has to sell an image even if it causes some displeasure to the few. As John Humphrys⁶⁸ wrote, "the world of sport is now a creation of the public relations industry. Image is reality, just as it is in so many other spheres. If you wish to prosper in a big way, then you sign up to that reality" (Holt and Mason, 2000: 174). This was the underlying idea for the presentation and the reason why people like Leona Lewis, David Beckham or Jimmy Page are the in-between marketers in a global sales pitch where everything is theatrical, manipulated, manufactured so that the ultimate product, an event or item of mass consumption to be sold, can be given greater visibility. The stars may change over time but they will nearly always be the front for a tough set of commercial and political realities.

The London 2012 Presentation, resembling a tourism advertisement, covers well-known London buildings, modes of transport, monuments and sites associated with certain characteristics envisaged as typically British, such as queuing. *Londonness* and *Britishness* seem to be two related but distinguishable concepts. Subsequently, the London 2012 Presentation centred its campaign on London icons at the same time as some British values were internally and externally promoted. Although the abovementioned presentation shows an over-generalized and somewhat phoney image of *Londonness*, it simultaneously sought to represent what its architects considered to be the *Zeitgeist*. The Government and the Olympic Committee are well aware of the Olympics' significant role in

⁶⁸John Humphrys was a BBC's journalist. This quotation was taken from the Sunday Times, 26 March 2000, p.21

health and sports education. This awareness is obvious when one analyses the government's education project, through which it expects to implement a national consciousness via "Olympic citizenship lessons in the frame of sport where such values as liberty for all, responsibility by all and fairness to all are to be proclaimed as national values." The London 2012 Presentation mirrored the claims of this city in respect of the co-habitation of peoples from so many different cultural backgrounds and in the service of which idea the term "multiculturalism" is most often deployed. London is also represented as a modern capital, as well as the best city to start significant changes since, as Boris Johnson said at the final presentation in Singapore "If you want to mobilise the youth of the world, start in London" (Johnson, 2005: 5).

Taking as a given the fact that holding the Olympics is a show of one's political and cultural status, it is not surprising to see that the mass media have taken a great interest in the bidding campaign to host the 2012 Olympics. On the one hand, governments have become aware of sport's social and economical importance. On the other hand, the Olympic Movement has gradually developed into a much more politicized movement closely following the *Zeitgeist*. Throughout the bidding campaign, Britain became "more like America. The amateur ideal of the athlete as undergraduate was replaced by the athlete as entrepreneur. For a moment, Sebastian Coe seemed to combine both possibilities. But not for long. He became a dogmatic free market ideologue and a Thatcherite MP. Amateurism increasingly belonged in the past (...). Professional sport reflected the values of the new and less paternalistic Britain: more competitive, more meritocratic, more culturally diverse and more materialistic" (Holt and Mason 2000: 176).

The abovementioned characteristics were also present in London's bid. Lord Coe was chosen to join the bidding team both because of his merit as a former Olympic champion and because of his innate competitiveness. Yet, as seen in chapter three, Lord Coe's team did not always act as if imbued with old Victorian values such as sportsmanship, decency or gentlemanly behaviour. The change of orientation of the Olympic ideal of De Coubertin (and of the English innovator John Astley Cooper) is palpable and there is little common ground between the London Olympics of the last century (1908 and 1948), where

amateurism was regarded as a core value, and those of the exploitative era we are currently living in. As an indication of what I mean, the Olympic Games have become a commodity ardently desired by the media. “NBC spent \$ 3.5 billion to acquire the rights to the 2000-2008 Olympic Games and recently spent another 2.2 billion for the rights to the 2010 and 2012 Games” (Billings, 2008: 429).

As for contemporary identity, it seems that the icons displayed during the eight-minute segment of the London 2012 Presentation in Beijing showed firstly how the British bid hoped others would see them. They were worried about external perceptions, about what the world would think of their hospitality and so icons were meant to advertise a “London - Open City”, rather than something strongly British. The London presented is therefore dynamic, pluricultural, integrating, respectful, tolerant, helpful, polite, and environmentally concerned. Nevertheless, at the end of this work other questions might be raised, such as: to what extent are any of these characteristics found to represent Londoners in any way representative of the British in general? Indeed, does promoting a particular set of characteristics as *distinctively British* actively help to achieve a better society in Britain? Secondly, at the start of the twenty-first century can one say that the British are as *inclusive* as far as national identity is concerned? Although they have started a process of building a more pluralistic Britain, where distances have been reduced by the Euro-Chunnel and budget airlines, and new alliances with its European neighbours have been built, how much has their insularity really changed? Tough times are coming. The new Conservative-Liberal government is for the first time in thirty years contemplating new and harsh restrictions on immigrant arrivals in Britain, and looking to inhibit job-seeking from Eastern Europe.

In this respect, London’s interests are not necessarily the same as Britain’s. The 1.9 million immigrants not born in the UK have every interest in the city remaining open to new arrivals and so do many of the more informed people who live, work and were born there. In his poem “The London Breed”, Benjamin Zephaniah writes about the magic of the city with its many languages and myriad of peoples and their backgrounds. London is not without faults because of its traffic, pollution and crime, but it is also imbued with immense charm:

(...)

Dis city can play any song
They came to here from everywhere
Tis they that made dis city strong.

A world of food displayed on streets
Where all the world can come and dine
On meals that end with bitter sweets
And cultures melt and intertwine,
Two hundred languages give voice
To fifteen thousand changing years
And all religions can rejoice
With exiled souls and pioneers.

(...)

I love dis concrete jungle still
With all its sirens and its speed
The people here united will
Create a kind of London breed.

Benjamin Zephaniah (2001)

As the final line of the poem suggests, foreign influences have for long contributed to making a “kind of London Breed”, somehow unique vis-à-vis the rest of the country. This hymn to the *London Breed* seems to suggest that the magic of the Games themselves will be matched by the magic of the city that hosts them.

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