

Opportunities for fieldwork in the Olympics area

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Between July 2005, when London won the right to host the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics, and July 2007, east London was ripe for geographical field study. The plans for the Olympic Park were being firmed up, organisations being put in place, and infrastructural change – such as underground electricity cables to replace the pylons – was largely being carried out underground and out of sight. The images of future Olympics and Paralympics venues could be downloaded. All that the willing geographer needed was a sense of imagination – record the present, take a glimpse into the future, and leave the rest to the imagination.

Opportunistic geographers have grasped the chance to conduct fieldwork in east London during those two years, and have tracked changes taking place in the east London environment. These are documented here in the RGS web site; as change occurs, further photographs and maps will be added so that it becomes possible to see how communities and environments have altered, and judge the extent to which ‘legacy’ is being achieved.

However, like all large plans, London’s Olympics and Paralympics are being subjected to ‘events’. Just as Canary Wharf blighted the progress of London’s Docklands regeneration when it went into receivership in 1993, so too London’s Olympics and Paralympics are likely to alter as part of the credit crunch that began in September 2007.

What kind of fieldwork?

London’s Olympics and Paralympics offer geographers considerable potential for fieldwork study.

- They offer a discrete study in which the themes of **change**, **regeneration**, and **sustainability** can be given a place focus.
- Because they are **part of** a process of regeneration that began with Docklands in the early 1980s and is likely to continue with commercial development such as Stratford City, they have a context in which regeneration for some of the poorest and most deprived areas of London and the UK.
- They allow first hand study of economic, social, and environmental **impact** – in which secondary sources can play as important a part as primary data.

Getting access to the sites

Access is now more difficult, and the imagination required of both teachers and their students is considerable. In July 2007, the ODA assumed ownership of the Marshgate Lane area, which forms the hub of the Olympics facilities. For both security and safety, the entire site – stretching from the southern borders close to Stratford north to the A12 – is now fenced off, creating a tall blue security fence that the ‘Guardian’ and others have referred to as east London’s Berlin wall. Clearly, this makes access difficult to the public generally and to geographers specifically!



Nonetheless, provided that fieldwork parties come to see the Olympics in the context of regeneration – and not simply observe only the Olympics sites – there are plenty of opportunities for students of all ages. Placed around the theme of regeneration, students could investigate and collect **primary** data for the following:

- Investigate Docklands and the nature of 1980s-style regeneration, that was market-led, which focused upon the development of a service economy, re-developed areas of derelict land into ‘secure’ housing, and convert warehousing and lofts, each of which would attract the middle-classes.
- Investigate the nature of communities such as Canning Town South, for which 2001 census data are available. In 2002, Queen Mary University of London (QMUL) took its second-year undergraduates into Canning Town and questioned a large sample of residents about what Canning Town was like to live in. Their results – and, usefully, their methodologies – are available [here](#).
- Investigate local perceptions of the Olympics as seen by local people in parts of Newham, e.g. Stratford shopping centre which is undercover, safe, and where residents are generally friendly enough towards students to answer questions. A perception format is available on the [RGS fieldwork web site](#). This perception framework covers economic, social and environmental aspects, and those questioned are asked to respond how well they believe that the Olympics will benefit them and the area.
- Investigate environmental quality in the areas which are still accessible from e.g. the canal or Lea River towpath and which pass the Olympics sites. These are the core area of Olympics sites and those which will form the new Olympics Park – and thus it will be possible to compare environmental quality now with the environmental impact of the new Olympics park using the computer-generated images on the London 2012 website.

- Investigate the environmental impact of the security wall on people's lives in east London and the extent to which they are being or are not being inconvenienced by the work going on. This could take the form of an environmental quality bi-polar assessment, like that used for environmental quality above.
- Observe the new Olympics Park using accessible sites such as the Stratford town centre multi-storey car park. This overlooks Stratford station, is easily accessed, and a view from the open-deck top floor shows the Olympics Park in its entirety. It is also possible to view the new Channel Tunnel Rail Link station from this site, and therefore the site of the new Stratford City development.

Students can then also use **secondary** data, such as –

- Photographs from 2005 onwards of different parts of the Olympics sites, enabling them to assess the degree of change. There are images available elsewhere on this site, for example:
[Images of Canning Town and Marshgate Lane](#)
[Images of Clays Lane](#)
[Images of the Olympic Park](#)
[A comparison of the Olympic site in 2007 and 2008](#)
- The London 2012 website which shows computer-generated images of the Olympics stadia and facilities, and of the new Olympic Park. To visit this website, go to www.london2012.com.
- The Census 2001 website which shows data for the different wards of Newham. To access these, go to www.statistics.gov.uk, click on 'Neighbourhood' and type in 'Canning Town South' for data for this ward. Other wards can be accessed by name or postcode.

In carrying out just some of these data collection techniques and using sources, students might be able to generate as much as the following list –

Identifying the need for regeneration – environmental

- EQS results for accessible Olympic sites. Examples include the overall view over the future Olympic Park from the multi-storey car park in Stratford, the view of the stadium from across the railway tracks from Pudding Mill Lane station (DLR – first stop outside Stratford).
- EQS results for areas such as Canning Town, compared to sites in Docklands, e.g. Canary Wharf or ExCel
- Annotated photos of locations visited

The impact of regeneration – environmental

- Environmental Impact Assessments of the Olympic sites using the computer images on the London 2012 website
- Annotated photos/images of these images and that of the aerial view of the Olympic Park

The need for regeneration – social and economic

- Graphs of social and economic data for wards such as Canning Town using 2001 census data
- Graphs generated from data collected by the 2002 Canning Town survey by

QMUL.

*The **impact** of regeneration – social and economic*

- Environmental Quality Survey graphs from Canary Wharf
- Graphs generated from perception surveys held in Canning Town or Stratford about how well local people think the Olympics will benefit them and the communities of east London.

And don't forget places outside London!

There are several Olympics and Paralympics sites outside London! Progress at some venues is exceptional. Sailing events are to be held next to Weymouth and Portland National Sailing Academy (WPNSA), in Dorset on the south coast. The old Naval Air Station at Portland has been renovated and redesigned, and is now known as Osprey Quay; new residential, commercial and marina facilities have been given planning permission and building started in May 2008. On one of the most exposed locations in the western English Channel, it provides superb natural sailing waters. Facilities include –

- A new slipway, 70 moorings and associated facilities.
- A new 600-berth commercial marina nearby. Part of the sailing venue, 250 of its berths will be used for test events as well as during the Games.

Construction should be completed by late 2008, making Weymouth and Portland one of the first venues completed for 2012.

How do I get to the sites shown in the field booklet?

In an ideal world, a coach will help you to see the contrasts between:

- places that have undergone regeneration in Docklands;
- places that have been left behind such as Canning Town South;
- the Olympic sites;
- Stratford and Stratford City, with an overview of the Olympic Park.

However, public transport is perfectly feasible. Book your students in advance and you should be able to purchase one-day Travelcards for your students for 80p each (October 2008). Check this at Transport for London – tfl.gov.uk.

- Start at **Canary Wharf or ExCel**. Each is on the DLR.
- Custom House for Excel station will also allow you access into **Canning Town South**. The main shopping parade on Freemasons Road is opposite the station once you've crossed Victoria Dock Road. Here you can carry out perception surveys as well as EQS.
- A short trip back on the DLR will take you to Stratford. To see the **Olympic Park** in progress is easy – simply cross the road from the station, go into the shopping centre and take the lifts inside the door to the 8th floor. One of the best free views in east London!

To see other sites around Stratford,

- walk east and then northwards along Major Road, past the construction college, to the site of the old Clays Lane Housing estate – to be the site of the **Olympic Village**.

- Take the overground to Hackney Wick and walk along Rothbury Road (see photo on page 2) as far as the blue wall; the area gives a good idea of what **regenerated housing** can look like in east London, and how housing like this will probably encircle much of Olympic Park after 2012.
- The **stadium** is best viewed from Pudding Mill Lane station, one stop east out of Stratford on the DLR.

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