

# **The Olympic Regeneration of East London in the Official Discourse. The Preconditions for the Construal of Public Space**

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## **Introduction**

As Mike Raco (2012) argues, the Olympics are not exceptional events whose analysis can be circumscribed within the narrow boundaries of the literature on mega-events. They need instead to be considered in relation to the current forms of urban politics and contemporary capitalism. Such forms are characterised by the shift from government to governance, which is turning representative democracy into a “second-level indirect representative democracy – citizens elect representatives who control and supervise ‘experts’ who formulate and administer policies in an autonomous fashion from their regulatory bastions” (Levi-Faur, 2005, p. 13).

Raco’s most recent work focuses on the framework of contracts and agreements between public authorities and corporations that shape the process of policy making, planning and *delivering* of London 2012 (Raco, 2014). This paper goes back to the preconditions for the formation of such a structure of governance. It focuses on the discourse, in Foucauldian terms, of laws, acts, plans and development strategies that construe a specific *knowledge* of urban public space; a knowledge that, I believe, shapes and enables the actual policies being enacted. This chapter aims, therefore, at understanding how the official discourse of laws, acts, plans, development strategies work in creating the preconditions for the formation of East London’s public space. As the focus is on the knowledge of public space (*publicness*), rather than on public space itself (on the *how*, rather than on the *what*) the question is how the dominant discourse of laws, acts, plans and development strategies shapes the concept of public space in East London urban regeneration.

As the notion of public space involves a number of diverse and even contrasting meanings

that cannot be synthesised in a single definition (Habermas, 1992), we need to outline what might be called an ideal model against which to evaluate the *publicness* emerging from such discourse. The basic features of this model must be identified since defining these, makes it possible to establish how and why urban space may be called public. Drawing on Hannah Arendt's reflections on democracy and the public sphere (1998), the conceptual element I assume as essential to any definition of public democratic space is plurality: the dialectical interaction between differences arising in the social realm. This chapter also addresses the extent to which the idea of *publicness* that is construed by contemporary official discourse differs/corresponds to an interpretation of the public sphere based on the idea of plurality - Arendt's pre-condition for democracy. As democracy and public space are discursive construals, the methodological approach I use is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA aims to understand and question the dominant assumptions and representations present in the social realm. As far as this analysis is concerned, such assumptions and representations consist of the worldviews, ideas, and interests that shape the official discourse of the Olympic-inspired regeneration of East London.

The chapter divides into two parts. Starting from Hannah Arendt's discussion on politics, the first elaborates on the notion of democratic public space. Here, I also draw upon Robert Dahl's interpretation of plurality (2002) and Colin Crouch's analysis of "post-democracy" - his term for the current phase of capitalism's development (2004, 2011). The concept of post-democracy helps to put into critical perspective the progressive elimination of plurality, hence democracy, from within the processes of policy and decision making; and from its expression in the competition between different economic actors in the market place. The second part focuses on the discourse presented in a number of key texts that have provided the framework for policy making in London: the Greater London Authority Act 1999, the London Plan 2011, the London Implementation Plan 2011, the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994, the CLM-Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) contract and the Mayor's Cultural Strategy.

The chapter concludes that the preconditions for the physical materialization of public space (*construction*) are set out in structures of governance and legal frameworks (*construal*). Such structures of governance and legal frameworks constitute discursive practices that reflect social relations of power and define the nature of public space itself (*publicness*).

### **Public space: a definition**

There is no single definition of public space. The concept spans, as Claudio De Magalhães explains, from all non-private realms of social life to all those spaces that perform public functions - no matter whether they are publicly or privately owned (De Magalhães, 2010, p. 561). The discussion reflects the wider debate on the public sphere, which Jürgen Habermas analysed in relation to the development of state institutions since the Greek *polis* (Habermas, 1992). In order to understand the publicness of East London's urban space in the official discourse of laws, acts, plans and development strategies, we need to identify some core principles to provide a definition of public urban space. As outlined earlier, the starting point for such a discussion is Hannah Arendt's idea of politics. The relevance of Hanna Arendt's work to this chapter is that it focuses on the conditions for politics rather than on politics itself (Canovan, 1998, p. vii). An important example is *plurality*; which is "not only the *conditio sine qua non*, but the *conditio per quam* of all political life" (Arendt, 1998, p. 7). Despite sharing a common nature, men are different from one another. *Action in speech*, that is to say politics, is where differences are revealed. Plurality is, therefore, the condition for the existence of politics, while the *polis* and public space are where such plurality is expressed and practiced; each cannot exist without the other. This implies an immaterial notion of *polis*, whose possibility does not rely on its physical location, but on the acting and speaking together of people (ibid., p. 198). That brings to the fore the concept of *entelechia*: Aristotle's idea of things developing out of an internal reason. According to this principle, Arendt explains, the means to achieve the end "would already be the end; and this 'end', conversely, cannot be considered a means in some other respect, because there is nothing higher to attain than this actuality itself" (ibid., p. 206-207). The implication of this for public space is that its purpose is nothing more, nor less, than the existence (and permanence) of public space itself. For public space is where plurality, hence democracy, is exercised.

In his attempt to identify a pure model of democracy against which to evaluate actual forms of government and political organisation, Robert Dahl argues that plurality (which he calls *polyarchy*) is a necessary requirement for democracy. Apart from free elections (which are a necessary but not sufficient condition for democracy) one of the essential requirements of representative democracy is to guarantee all citizens equal possibilities to engage in political activity, to take part in and affect the processes of policy making within political parties, unions, associations, interest groups and other civic associations (Dahl, 2002). From a critical standpoint, Colin Crouch shows how one of the consequences of increasingly closer relationships between governments and

corporations in the form of the contracting out of services and functions is the progressive reduction of both public control and accountability in policy making, and of economic competition in the market. The antidote to such a reduction of democracy is seen in the strengthening of civic society; that is to say, the plurality of forces, institutions, organisations and actors constituting the societal world. Plurality and *entelechia* are necessary preconditions for the creation of democratic urban space. As I shall discuss later in this chapter, insofar as culture and urban space are no longer ends in themselves and become means to attract tourists and investors' money, the democratic mechanisms of discussion and negotiation between different social forces, groups and subjects is turned into the bureaucratic management of top-down strategies. Such strategies constitute, in turn, the preconditions for the degradation of the civic and for the formation of an undemocratic public space.

The formation of a democratic or an undemocratic space has an intrinsic discursive nature; for it is enacted through consultation, law making, public discussion, and the media. (Habermas, 1992). As I argue elsewhere (Desiderio, 2013), far from being something immaterial, discourse plays a central role in shaping the societal world in its physical form. By enacting policies, the discourse of laws, acts, plans and development strategies also shapes the form and the practices of urban space. As Norman Fairclough, Simon Pardoe and Bronislaw Szerszynski explain, discourse can be interpreted as a combination of *discourses*, *genres* and *styles*. “Discourses: ways of *representing* the world from particular perspectives [...]. Genres: ways of *acting* and *interacting* with other people, in speech or writing [...]. Styles: ways of *identifying*, constructing or enunciating the self, including both social and institutional identities [...]” (Fairclough, Pardoe, Szerszynski, 2010, pp. 418-419). The discourse framing the regeneration of East London (in which urban space becomes an asset: a means to achieve the accumulation of capital in various forms) entails a specific genre, that is to say a specific way of acting and interacting in space. One such genre is shopping, which becomes the principle of a planning policy envisaging London as a place for lifestyle. In this context culture is no longer an end in itself, but a complex of marketing strategies aimed at attracting more tourists and investment. Such discourse and genre imply in turn style: a specific way of being of urban space in terms of form and practices - which also entails the construction of individual and collective identities.

Such discourse also reflects the shift from government to governance described by Colin Crouch (2011) and David Levi-Faur (2004, 2005). The shift is characterised by the contracting out of public services to big corporations – whose aim is to freeze competition in the market

place by securing exclusive relations with governments and public authorities. Such “privatisation of the market” – as Crouch calls it – reflects the privatisation of decision making processes and the weakening of the mechanisms of public accountability and control. By assuming exclusive control of public services, firms and corporations are not, in fact, accountable to taxpayers, voters and citizens but to their clients, and are judged by their capability to fulfil the terms of the contract. The elimination of politics at the level of law making by this process of privatization, is reflected in the elimination of plurality at the level of the forms, uses and practices of space.

### **The GLAACT 1999**

The organisation of the London Olympics 2012 is characterised by a shift from *deliberation* to *delivery* (Raco, 2012); which entails a change in the policies, practices and interpretation of democracy. This is an important shift, as it marks the difference between democratic government, where the possibility of discussing issues from different perspectives and approaches is guaranteed; and non-democratic governance, where institutions focus on the delivery of a product. The key principles of such non-democratic urban governance, as Raco explains, are to ‘get things done’ and deliver ‘on time’ and ‘to budget’ (Raco, 2014).

The discourse of the Olympics is composed of words and concepts such as change, priorities, delivery and strategy. Accordingly, social practices and services such as urban planning and culture become *strategic sectors* - elements of a wider strategy aimed at delivering a product. I take as a starting point for this discussion the GLA Act 1999: the act that establishes the Greater London Authority (GLA) and its functions (GLA, 1999). The Mayor’s prerogative and actions are defined in this legislation in terms of ‘strategy’: ‘The Mayor’s strategies’, ‘General duties of the Mayor in relation to his strategies’, ‘The Mayor’s spatial development strategy’, ‘Culture strategy and tourism’, ‘The Cultural Strategic Group for London’ (Greater London Authority Act 1999, pp. 25-44).

The word strategy originates from the ancient Greek *strategós*: general, commander, literally army leader. *Strategema* is the Greek word for war trickery, stratagem, ploy. The verb *strategeo* means “I employ a stratagem”, “I manoeuvre in order to”, “I deceive somebody”. Strategy has, therefore, an intrinsic military meaning, implying shrewdness and the capacity

to overcome obstacles and defeat enemies, by plotting and deceiving. It indicates a means to an end. As we shall see later in this chapter, in the Mayor's Spatial development strategy and Culture strategy, planning and culture are not the domain of specific policies aimed at improving London's public sphere, but instruments to make London attractive to investors and tourists.

### *Culture Strategy and Tourism*

The discourse of strategy implies the discourse of delivery and vice versa. Both of them need to be considered in the context of the progressive reduction of democracy from decision making processes. The creation of independent agencies with contracting out powers and the complex of contracts and agreements establishing the relations between public authorities and contractors are meant to deliver projects without going through the processes of political discussion and control. As culture is part of the Mayor's strategic plan for London, the act establishes the Cultural Strategy Group for London, whose task is to 'formulate and submit to the Mayor a draft strategy containing policies with respect to culture, media and sport in Greater London' (section 376, pp. 450-52). The questions are: Why does culture need a strategy? How is the concept of culture articulated?

I shall answer the second question first. Culture here is a key investment sector to maintain and increase London's status as a global city. As Frederic Jameson suggests, in late capitalism the concept of culture exceeds more traditional meanings such as knowledge or, say, civilisation, and comes to include the disparate elements of spectacle and consumerism, so that the boundaries between, for example, art, history, shopping, food, music, tourism and sport blur. The GLA Act 1999 reflects this dynamic, as culture is conceived as part of a strategy of urban development along with media and sport (the title of Part 10 Chapter 1 of the Act is 'Culture Strategy and Tourism'). That also answers the first question. Since culture is a key element in London's image as global capital and, as Andrew Calcutt suggests, finance's twin sister, it becomes an asset (Calcutt, 2012, p. 67). It is turned into a product to be traded on the market on the basis of calculations about its capacity to produce more capital. The implication of this is that governance, for culture's development, cannot be left to the free play of different social actors in society.

The GLA Act sets out the conditions for such a form of governance. The Cultural Strategy

Group for London is currently composed of 23 members who are appointed by the Mayor Boris Johnson and are selected from a number of public and private institutions. The official page of the group reads: the group's

“primary role is to develop the Mayor's Culture Strategy – maintaining and promoting London as a world-class city of culture. Members represent regional cultural agencies and key institutions across London, acting as the voice of the cultural sector, to monitor and present to the Mayor the ongoing challenges and needs of the sector” (GLA, <http://www.london.gov.uk/priorities/arts-culture/london-cultural-strategy-group>).

These few lines present the reader with some of the claims characterising, according to Norman Fairclough, contemporary political discourse. Changes in the way that States are governed are deemed as necessary to answer the challenges of global financial capitalism; which means that states and cities need to compete against each other to secure a privileged position on the map of global capital. Since in the current economic and political discourse to gain such a position has become an unquestionable priority, as a result the traditional distinctions between ‘right’ and ‘left’ blurs (Fairclough, 2010a, p. 172). By the same token, general consent is sought for policies and projects deemed to answer the requirements of global financial markets; so that any opposition to such policies and projects is silenced. The Olympics as catalyst for urban regeneration and culture and as a complex of strategic policies are to be understood in this context. They become, in other words, an instrument for ‘maintaining and promoting London as a world-class city of culture’; that is to say, London's status as a city for tourism, lifestyle, investments, and consumption.

As culture becomes a key asset, cultural strategy has to be delivered without any political interference. The GLA Act provides the conditions for the elimination of politics. The Act establishes the right for the group to ‘enter into arrangements with any other person or organisation for or in connection with the carrying on by that person or organisation of any activity which the Authority has power to carry on’ (GLA, 1999, Section 378, 3d, p. 234). According to the Act, the planning of cultural activities is a top-down process enacted by the Cultural Strategy Group, whose decisions can in principle rely on the knowledge of experts and organisations which may have the right to elaborate and enact policies on behalf of the group. Despite being contracted by public funds, these experts and organisations would not be accountable to representative bodies such as London's Assembly or the Parliament; for they act on the basis of contracts and agreements signed with the group, which is the only authority they need to answer to. Thus,

culture in London is not a horizontal and independent practice, but is turned into a privatised business aimed at making the city an attractive place for tourists and investors.

### **The London Plan 2011 and the London Implementation Plan**

The London plan 2011, also known as the ‘Mayor’s Spatial Strategy’, turns the discourse of delivery into a planning strategy. The first objective of the strategy is to retain and build upon its world city status as one of the three financial centres of global reach. It must be somewhere that people and businesses want to locate, with places and spaces to meet their needs. This economic dynamism is vital to ensuring the prosperity Londoners need, to maintaining the world-beating innovation increasingly needed to address global challenges, and to secure the highest quality development and urban environments’ (GLA, 2011, p. 6).

These introductory lines are characterised by the same semiotic elements that characterise the Cultural Strategy Group’s statement. The Mayor re-contextualises the language and meanings of the global financial economy discourse in creating guidelines for ‘his’ planning policies. This entails specific linguistic strategies operating on both the macro and the micro level.

The dynamics at work in global financial capitalism are represented as self-sustaining, a-historical and necessary forces whose existence is independent from human agency. In so doing, such forces become unquestionable: natural facts that ‘we’ all have to adapt to in order to prosper. As Fairclough explains, the ‘we’ = the government as opposed to “they” = past governments and/or political opposition. The characterising narratives of identities is turned into a “we” = the country. In the Mayor’s discourse “we” is identified with Londoners and the rest of the United Kingdom. “We = the Londoners and the rest of the UK” embraces the entire political, ideological and cultural spectrum, so that the existence of any political, ideological and cultural opposition is denied. This fact is reflected in verb modality, which indicates what ‘must’ and ‘needs’ to be done in order for London: 1) to maintain its status as “world city and one of three business centres of global reach”; 2) to be “somewhere people and business want to locate”; 3) “to ensure the prosperity of Londoners” (GLA, *ibid.*, p. 6). It is significant that the Plan is limited to the provision of guidelines, without indicating any specific policies or the means by which they will be enacted. To put it simply, the Plan provides a very generic ‘what’ without providing the ‘how’; for the how is contained in the contracts and agreements between public authorities and private contractors. The plan thus becomes an open and flexible instrument to

allow the enactment of specific policies formulated in contracts and agreements.

The Olympics are said to be ‘providing a global showcase for the capital’ and to constitute a ‘unique opportunity to secure and accelerate the delivery of many elements of the Mayor’s strategies, and for this reason it is the Mayor’s highest regeneration priority for this period’ (GLA, 2011, p. 24). “Deprivation” is a key concept. Once East London is classified as a “priority”, the adoption of “special policies” is urged. The second chapter of the plan, in fact, ‘sets out special policies for areas of London facing particular needs or with distinctive parts to play in the capital’s development over the period to 2031, particularly using the legacy of the 2012 Games to regenerate the Lower Lea Valley’ (GLA, 2011, p. 34). From a theoretical perspective, discourse is not limited to the realm of mental representations, but becomes materialised into ‘real’ practices and policies, which in turn shape the physical transformation of urban space. The implication of the discourse of ‘special policies’ and ‘delivery’ in terms of democratic control and accountability is that processes of policies and decision making rest, as Mike Raco demonstrates, on a complex system of contracts and agreements that determine the exclusive relations between the client (the Government, the Mayor, etc.) and the contractor (private companies, corporations, etc.) - to the exclusion of the mechanisms of participatory democracy.

As the Cultural Strategy establishes the Cultural Strategy group, so the London Plan establishes the London Implementation Plan. The latter is designed to ‘support and facilitate the implementation of the Plan’s policies’ (GLA, 2011, p. 278) and ‘set out how the policies of the London Plan will be translated into practical action’ (GLA, 2013b, p. 5)”. The Implementation Plan in turn establishes the Implementation Group, whose aims are: to:

“a) assist in providing the Mayor with data or potential sources of data required for the development and updating of the Implementation Plan; b) assist in providing the Mayor with advice and analysis; c) suggesting and delivering actions for inclusion in the Implementation Plan; d) assist in making policy recommendations to the Mayor on matters relating to implementation and infrastructure planning for possible inclusion in the London Plan and/or other strategies. The Implementation Group is chaired and managed by GLA officers. Representatives are drawn from delivery agencies covering different types of strategic infrastructure. Local authority officers and community representatives as well as other key stakeholders involved in infrastructure planning are also represented” (GLA, 2013b, pp. 6-7).

It might be argued that such discourse does not preclude the exercise of a form of democratic control; for, as we have just read, local authority officers and

community representatives are, in fact, involved. The issue at stake, however, is not the disappearance of democratic institutions and instruments, but that they are deprived of their content, hence disempowered, since the Plan establishes a discourse which sets out the preconditions for the ‘privatisation’ of the processes of decision and policy making. No matter that the principal agent enacting such discourse is a public authority, the publicness that is entailed lacks in plurality - plurality meaning the variety of civic organisations and social actors that should be involved in the processes of policy and decision making, and the wider regime of economic competition.

In this document the concepts of strategy and delivery are in fact employed to reinforce the image of states, governments and public finance as incapable of undertaking and managing projects as big and demanding as the Olympics. The emphasis is on the importance of the private sector in financing and delivering the strategy, (see, for instance, paragraph 2.19); the relevance of tools such as Business Development Districts (see paragraphs 2.7 and 2.14) and the reference to ‘significant constraints on public expenditure’ (paragraph 4.3). All this needs to be read in the context of a more or less explicit critique of public institutions. The Implementation Group’s role in supporting the implementation of the Plan is important, as it affirms, “in the light of the demonstrated complexity of implementation planning and the lack of capacity of public sector planning staff in this area” (GLA, *ibid.*, p. 75, paragraph 5.13).

### **The Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 and the CLM-ODA Contract**

The Deregulation and Contracting Out Act (1994) enables the reduction of democratic control and accountability within the decision making processes involving public and private sectors. The Act establishes restrictions on disclosure of information whenever ‘a contractor is authorised to exercise any function of a Minister, office-holder or local authority’ and whenever ‘the disclosure of relevant information, in or in connection with the exercise of the relevant function or a related function, is restricted by any enactment or by any obligation of confidentiality’ (Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994, p. 120). It regulates the disclosure of information between public authorities and contractors, and between the contractors themselves. No mention is made of public disclosure, as disclosure is only conceived between contracting

parties and as long as it is “necessary or expedient for the purpose of facilitating the exercise of the relevant function” (ibid., pp. 120-121).

Such criteria inform the contract between the ODA (the Olympic Delivery Authority) and its delivery partner, CH 2 M Hill, Laing O’ Rourke and Mace (CLM). Section 70.1 clearly states that ‘each party does not disclose information to any third party without the other Party’s prior acceptance; does not use information it receives from the other except for the purpose of this contract; does not copy information it receives from the other except to the extent necessary for it to use information for the purpose of this contract’ (ODA, 2005, p. 40). Furthermore, the contract establishes that the delivery partner has the right to disclose information ‘to its employees and Sub-consultants only to the extent necessary for them to undertake their duties to provide the services; and is treated in confidence by them and not disclosed without the Employer’s prior acceptance or used by them otherwise than for the purpose of providing the services’ (ibid.). As Mike Raco explains in relation to ODA’s information policy (Raco requested a copy of the ODA-CLM contract on the basis of the Freedom of Information Act), while the ODA says that there is a public interest in obtaining information about important processes of decision and policy making; it also says that disclosure of information is restricted to protect CLM in relation to competitors. Since CLM acts on behalf of a public authority, the ODA, restrictions on the release of information are justified on the basis of public interest itself, as it may be prejudicial to it. Large parts of the ODA-CLM contract are for this reason redacted and classified as ‘commercially confidential’ (Raco, 2012, pp. 456-457).

The concept of ‘ambush marketing’ is in this regard significant. Ambush marketing, the contract reads:

“means any activity, commercial or non-commercial, undertaken by any person or entity, whether public or private, that creates, implies or refers to a direct or indirect association of any kind (including an association in the minds of members of the public) with any Games Body or the Games (including by reference to the City of London and the year 2012), which has not been authorised by the LOCOG or any other Games Body” (ODA, 2005, p. 40).

At stake here is what may be called the ‘privatisation of language’. Such privatisation of language exceeds, I believe, the realm of spoken and written language and involves the realm of mental associations. How is it possible to establish which words and/or images prompt an association with the Games, the Games bodies, the City of London and even the 2012 in people’s mind? How is it possible to establish how such an association works? The ODA-CLM

contract reflects the reduction of plurality (competition) within the market place, as it establishes the exclusive relations between them; but there is more at stake here. The fundamental issue is the shift of judicial and legal frameworks from an instrument for the enactment of the bourgeois public sphere in the eighteenth century (the division between public authority and the public sphere within which a space arises where private owners independently and ‘freely’ engage in economic exchange - the classic liberal model of laissez faire capitalism); to a founding principle for the capitalist relations of production of the late nineteenth/early twentieth century (in which the state actively engages with the sphere of economic exchange to secure the conditions for their reproduction) (Habermas, 1992); to an instrument for the top-down regulation of the public sphere by regulatory frameworks in which the state, the market and society are no longer distinct entities (the ‘closing down’ of public sphere) (Levi-Faur, 2005, p. 14). Such contemporary regulatory frameworks rely on a complex process of contracts and agreements written by ‘experts’ and specialised firms (Raco 2012, 2014); which are aimed at mitigating “negative externalities through ‘social regulation’ (or the regulation of risk)”. (Levi-Faur, 2005, p. 14). The function of law is, therefore, to protect the exclusive commercial relations between the public authority and private contractors and subcontractors, rather than guaranteeing competition in the market place and the mechanisms of democratic participation in the processes of policy and decision making.

### **The Mayor’s Cultural Strategy**

Culture and planning constitute strategic elements of a wider strategy, ‘Cultural Metropolis. The Mayor’s Cultural Strategy – 2012 and Beyond’; which involves a number of ‘strategic’ sectors such as education, jobs, skills, transport, infrastructure. Culture here indicates a complex of economic and productive strategies that need to be managed and cannot be left to the spontaneous play of social actors. By the same logic, the Olympics become a means to revitalise an economic system whose capacity to create and absorb surplus value has much decreased over recent years (Poynter, 2012). The regeneration of East London provides the space for the production and the absorption of such new capital (Harvey, 2006a); while the materialisation of culture as lifestyle in a ‘real’ urban space is what enacts the process of production-absorption-reproduction of capital.

All this implies the concepts of ‘priorities’ and ‘prioritisation’. “The role of the GLA and

the Mayor is to work in partnership across the cultural sector and its myriad organisations in order to set priorities, provide leadership and deliver long-term improvements. The cultural sector is large, complex and highly interdependent. Therefore, this strategic role is crucial in helping make better use of existing resources, develop innovative solutions and link culture to other strategic areas of importance in the capital. A key responsibility of the Mayor is ‘to advocate the importance of culture, ensuring it is supported with appropriate investment and remains free from unnecessary bureaucracy and interference’ (Mayor of London, 2012:, p. 155). Culture and cultural activities are not considered as ends in themselves, as they are ranked, hence financed, out of their supposed capacity to produce profit. To free policy making from ‘unnecessary bureaucracy and interference’ means to bypass politics and the mechanisms of public control and accountability. In this way ‘culture’ becomes the realm for the bureaucratic management of an asset, rather than the realm for the free interaction of different social actors and ideas.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter analysed how the official discourse of laws, acts, plans and development strategies that framed the decision making process of the Olympics and the urban regeneration of East London creates the preconditions for public space formation; and how the language of such discourse works in defining the nature of public space (publicness). It employed a deductive approach, which proceeds from the identification of a pure idea of democracy, public sphere and public space, and goes on to compare this idea with the kind of publicness emerging from the analysis of texts. The element informing such an ideal-type (that is to say, the element without which it is not possible to refer to urban space in terms of democratic public space) is Hannah Arendt’s concept of plurality; which is to be understood in terms of the free play of differences (in visions, perspectives, values, ideas, identities and economic actors) in the social realm. Democratic public space is, therefore, a space to provide the conditions for such differences to emerge and interact. The opposite of democratic public space is the imposition of one single vision, perspective, and identity; which is reflected in the reduction of competition between different economic actors in the market place.

The kind of publicness of East London’s public space is analysed against the three interrelated dimensions of legislation, culture and governance. The level of legislation to be found in the

complex of laws, acts, plans and development strategies establishes the content of a politics of space that is mainly articulated in terms of *strategy* and *culture*, or of *cultural strategy*. Culture comes to indicate a strategic sector for the management and the transformation of space as a site for leisure, tourism, investments and consumption, rather than as a site for the free play of different social-economic actors. This implies the construction of a system of governance (Raco, 2012, 2014) to deliver such strategies ‘on time and to budget’ and regulate risk (“social regulation”) (Levi-Faur, 2005). This form of governance in turn, entails the reduction of politics (and the ‘risks’ connected to it) within the processes of policy and decision making and, hence, the curtailing of democracy.

Such a dynamic needs to be placed in the context of the transformation of the public sphere. As Jurgen Habermas explains, with the rise of the market economy the separation of public sphere from public authority - that is to say the separation of the space for political action and economic exchange between private owners from the state – was substituted at the end of the 18th\beginning of the 19th century by the concentration of political and economic power in territorial states (Habermas, 1992, p. 141). This brought about a different kind of separation between the public and the social - the former taking over powers of political and economic administration, the latter being limited to the intimate sphere of the family and culture consumption. In the current phase of late capitalism, another shift occurred, which did not cause the separation of the state from the economy in the form of deregulation, but, as Levi-Faur shows, resulted in an even stronger relationship between the state, economy, politics and society in the form of regulatory capitalism (Jordana and Levi-Faur, 2004; Levi-Faur, 2005). Regulatory frameworks are required that limit the risks of competition in the global market and adjust social change to needs of capital , so that political and social opposition are restrained. A shift therefore occurs “from representative democracy to indirect representative democracy. Democratic governance is no longer about the delegation of authority to elected representatives but becomes a form of second-level indirect representative democracy - citizens elect representatives who control and supervise ‘experts’ who formulate and administer policies in an autonomous fashion from their regulatory bastions” (Levi- Faur, 2005, p. 13).

However, it would be simplistic to say that urban, social and economic processes of transformation and change are solely economy-led. The economy is part of a wider structuring dimension in which I regard discourse as a site for political action. Legislation, culture and governance construe a precise knowledge of space and the societal world that is enacted through

texts. Such a discourse, which implies specific social relations of power, sets out the preconditions for the construction of physical 'public' space, and defines the content of publicness itself. The implication of this is that no matter how many people use space, no matter whether space is publicly or privately owned, no matter whether the ultimate agent of regeneration is a public authority, public space does not necessarily equal democracy; for democracy and 'publicity' are not intrinsic qualities of urban space, but only exist as long as they are practiced and enacted.

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