

CLR-GB

Newsletter 1/2012

The **CLR-GB** Office is a platform linking CLR activities at EU and GB levels as well as trade union and academic work in GB in the field of Construction Labour Research. It will support related initiatives specific to GB.

Introductory Note:

A lot has happened since the last newsletter nearly a year ago (2/2011). On a positive note, London 2012 was a success story for the construction industry, with zero accidents reported on a project that was delivered on time and to budget. Yet, on the industrial relations front, momentum is picking up with the austerity protests sweeping across Europe, rising unemployment especially amongst the youth, and growth of the Occupy Movement. In this issue, we focus on the topical issue of 'Legacies and Impacts'. The proceedings of a seminar on 'Building the Olympic Games' is first presented, followed by a summary of a debate session that took place at a recent Annual Conference of the Association of Researchers in Construction Management (ARCOM) Conference in Bristol in September. You are also invited to participate in a forthcoming seminar on 'Diversity and Exclusion' in Construction.

Paul W Chan/CLR-GB December 2012

Building the Olympic Games: what is the legacy for construction labour and employment?

Centre for the Production of the Built Environment (ProBE), University of Westminster, Monday 30 April 2012

In many ways, London 2012 is a resounding success. The opening ceremony confirmed the UK's ability to put on as good a show as any other host nation, showcasing with creative flair the many contributions the British Isles have left the world from the arts, literature, popular culture and theatre, to the critical significance of the working classes and the industrial revolution, to the transformative power of the World Wide Web. London 2012 also brought a renewed confidence in that the UK's performance on the medals table is the best in over a Century, securing third place after the US and China. The London Olympics is also dubbed the 'Equality Games', with women representing every participating country for the first time. Indeed, as the Olympic torch made its way throughout the country to the opening ceremony, people from every walk of life – the young and the aged, the sick and the infirm, the disabled, and the minority communities – all shared a common platform. Of course, one must never forget that the building of the sporting facilities was delivered on time and to budget and with an impeccable safety record. It is therefore a befitting tribute that the final moments of the torch's entry into the stadium should be marked by a line of 500 construction workers who were involved in building the facilities.

Nevertheless, it is a crucial moment to begin to reflect on the legacies of London 2012, and potential impacts for society in the future. Professor Linda Clarke set the scene for the seminar, which builds on an earlier *CLR News* edition that traced the experiences and impacts of a number of earlier Olympics development sites, including Barcelona (1992), Atlanta (1996), Sydney (2000), Athens (2004) and Beijing (2008). Linda posed the question as to what legacies Olympics development projects leave behind? In some cases, there are positive legacies such as economic regeneration, introduction of better labour market regulation (e.g. posting of workers directive), and enhanced participation in the labour market. In others, there are questionable legacies such

as continued health and safety problems, and erosion of pay and working conditions. In any case, high profile projects such as the Olympics Development have serious implications for developments in the labour market. Often, such projects leave a legacy of shaping various aspects of employment relations, including education and training, equality, diversity and inclusion, and employer responsibility/liability. Indeed, every Olympics Development acts as a catalyst for change in regulatory frameworks. The seminar brought together three different speakers, critically reviewing the experiences in Barcelona, Athens and London.

Dr. Justin Byrne (CEACS, Madrid): Impacts of the Barcelona (1992) Olympics

Justin presented observations of the impacts of the Olympics, based on a review of the secondary literature. Barcelona Olympics was an archetypal mega-event, in terms of duration, scale and complexity. It must be remembered that 1992 was meant to be a big year in Spain, with the organisation of the Seville World Expo, Madrid's candidature as European Capital City of Culture, and the Barcelona Olympics. Yet, the scene in the 1980s was a different one. Spain was entering into the era of post-Franco modernity. Thus, the Olympics was seen to be an immense opportunity to stimulate tourism and the economy, and to place Barcelona on the (business) world map. Urban renewal and regeneration occurred on a massive scale. Construction accounted for over 80% of the economy, a scale comparable to post-WWII rebuilding work. In many ways, the Barcelona Olympics left a lasting, positive legacy. Trade unions tried to capitalise on 'The Olympics Aura'. However, there was strong international scrutiny, and a sense of maintaining the 'Olympic Social Peace'. So, whilst there were threats of strike between 1988 and 1990 – on a range of issues including wage rates, employment contracts, health and safety, and training – these dampened closer to the launch of the games. Barcelona was now seen on a world stage. Nevertheless, there is much to celebrate from the Barcelona games, including job creation, better earnings derived from collective bargaining, improved health and safety (although there were still 12 fatal accidents), in a relatively conflict-free period of construction. The EC Directive 96/71 on Posting of Workers was also borne out of the Barcelona Olympics Development programme. But how effective are these in reality? Justin also talked about excessive and illegal working hours, temporary and bogus self-employment, and negligible impact of training scheme (only 100 trainees were placed). There were also 10% of the non-Spanish labour force that were largely unregulated.

Lefteris Kretsos (University of Greenwich): Legacies of Athens - Rise of Precarious Employment

Lefteris reported that almost ten years after the Athens Games, the Olympics are now demonized in the press as an unnecessary burden for the suffering Greek economy. He dismissed the dominant view that Greek workers are resistant to structural labour reform and over-protected. This is far from the truth with the Athens Games. The trade unions had a strategic opportunity then to try and increase membership and balance divisions between capital and labour. Yet, the trade unions gave up the right to strike, claims for collective working time reduction, and agreed to the suspension of annual summer leave for many workers and to extension of shopping before and during the Olympics. This was, of course, set in a context of political hype around the benefits of the Olympics - 97.5% of the population were in favour of organising the games in the country in 2000. Yet, despite fifteen years of continuous growth before the Olympics, the situation in Greece is now very grave. Whilst the Olympics was built by large companies like Hochtief, Vinci, and Dragados – which helped reduce the unemployment rate by 1% – 3% between 1995 – 2004 – there is at present continued erosion of working conditions and rising unemployment. He also noted that there was a €1.5bn loan taken for financing the Olympics, but that this is not properly accounted for in the national accounts. It is not clear where the money is distributed and how this was spent. At the same time, the post-Olympics picture included a dramatic increase in outsourcing and rise in migrant employment. Neoliberalist ideas have certainly come to roost. Trade unions, Lefteris argued, missed an opportunity to increase their influence as he suggested that large unions had collective interests with the main political parties. The result, he bemoaned, is the sacrifice of future generations.

Aletha Holborough (University of Westminster): London 2012 Olympic – employment and vocational education training opportunities?

Aletha explored inequalities in the experiences between Black, Asian and Ethnic Minorities (BAMEs) and the White majority in making the transition from end-of-compulsory-schooling to full-time employment. She evaluated the experiences of youths living in a number of East London boroughs, including Hackney and Tower Hamlets, Newham (with one of the highest percentage of children on state benefits), and Walthamstow (a borough plagued by gang culture). Hackney has the highest proportion of youths not in education, employment or training (NEETs). Aletha reported that despite targets set by the Olympic Development Agency (ODA), there is a need to examine more closely the achievements on a number of measures, including the impacts on

opportunities for women, BAME and disabled people. Aletha also highlighted the success of over 426 apprentices working on the Olympic site, but raised a question on the sustainability of their employment. Indeed, Aletha asked if the Olympics can really start solving deep-rooted problems of social deprivation, and if talk about legacies would dissipate over time.

The presentations stimulated a lively discussion and raised more questions to consider, including:

- What is the role of history in the assessment of legacies and impacts? What time frame should one look at when establishing whether the outcomes are positive or not?
- How do we account for the aspirations of individuals living around the area altered by the Olympics Development?
- What is the validity of official statistics in illustrating the impacts of the Olympics Development? How can we ensure that the official figures are trustworthy? How are the targets set, and are the categories used meaningful?
- What else can be done to ensure further outreach is done to develop a more equal, diverse and inclusive construction industry? How do we ensure that the Olympics hype and aura continues?
- Are comparative studies really helpful? Are we comparing legacies and impacts in a like-for-like manner?

Following the presentations and discussion, a film produced by Margaret Dickinson was shown to conclude the seminar. The film depicted, amongst other things, the sense of hope brought about by the Olympics Development as shown in the aspirations of the youths interviewed in the film. At the same time, broader questions are raised in terms of the potential role that the Olympics Development could have played in bringing about wider transformation of employment practices in the industry. Nevertheless, the discussion that followed acknowledged some of the successes that are worth celebrating in the London 2012 story, including most crucially the realisation of zero accidents on site.

Report from ARCOM 2012: The ARCOM Debate on Legacies and Impacts

Our Dynamic Earth, Edinburgh, Tuesday 4 September 2012

The theme for this year's Debate at the Annual Conference of the Association of Researchers in Construction Management (ARCOM) was "Legacies and Impacts". The choice of this theme was inspired by contemporary interest in the legacies of high-profile construction projects such as the London 2012 Olympics Development, as well as increasing accountability of impacts in the assessment of research. The panellists participating in this year's debate included Aletha Holborough (Doctoral researcher, University of Westminster), Don Ward (CEO, Constructing Excellence), Professor Allyson Pollock (Professor of Public Health Research and Policy at Queen Mary, University of London), Jo Twine (Director and Founder of Perducta Limited), and Gordon Banks (MP, Labour Party). The debate was chaired by Paul Chan (University of Manchester).

The debate commenced with Aletha exploring the impacts of the Olympics Development on the socio-economic development of the local boroughs in the East End of London, reporting a mixed picture in terms of vocational education and training (VET) participation and local employment. This led her to pose the question as to how legacies of large development projects in the public domain can be established, and for whom. Don provided a contrasting view, and argued that the UK construction industry has seen tremendous improvements over the last twenty years, in terms of productivity (time and cost savings) and health and safety performance. He also noted that legacies and impacts do take time to realise, and that the success of London 2012 is, in many respects, a result of a legacy of major projects that have gone before (e.g. Channel Tunnel, Heathrow Terminal 5 etc.). Speaking about the experiences of public healthcare in the UK, Allyson stated that political decisions made decades ago to open up public services to competition and increasing privatisation are now coming home to roost in terms of higher costs to taxpayers and users, decreased access and excessive profits and rates of return. She called for research into financing models, and made the case for government control over redistribution and surpluses. Jo argued that what mattered most was that modern and better facilities are provided for the end-users, whatever the financing model may be. She remarked that improvements have been made to the built environment and private financing has had an important role to play, a point reiterated by Gordon Banks.

Indeed, both proponents and critics on the panel agreed that the increasing marketisation of public services required rigorous evaluation to establish the consequences of policy decisions to end-users. Of course, academic researchers have a crucial role to play in asking the often-difficult questions that

surround the legacies and impacts of policy decisions. Allyson stressed that researchers must ensure that these questions continue to be asked and that any analysis must avoid shifting with the winds of political change. Aletha concluded the panel debate by asking researchers to think about future generations when framing their research problems.

For the full report, please visit www.arcom.ac.uk shortly.

Launch of CLR News 3-2012 on Diversity and Exclusion in Construction

This issue has been co-edited by Linda Clarke and Paul Chan. Articles cover health and safety practices in the context of migrant workers working in the construction industry, with examples provided by Danish and American colleagues. The prospects (or rather challenges) of young workers in the Greek construction industry is also reviewed. There are also articles relating to gender and sexuality in construction. An update of the blacklisting scandal in the UK construction industry is also provided to illustrate the far-reaching implications of such 'hidden' exclusion. Two books were also reviewed in this edition, including Darren Thiel's *Builders: Class, Gender and Ethnicity in the Construction Industry*, and Nicolas Pons-Vignon and Phumzile Ncube's *Confronting Finance*.

To access this edition of CLR News, please visit <http://tinyurl.com/CLRNews3-2012>.

Forthcoming ProBe seminar and CLR GB AGM: Exclusion and work-life balance in the construction sector – how can they be challenged?

University of Westminster Room M211, 35 Marylebone Road, London NW1S 5LB (opposite Madame Tussauds and Baker Street Tube Station) Tuesday 11 December 2012, 3:00pm to 7:00pm

The Centre for the Study of the Built Environment (ProBE) has organised this event in the light of growing concerns about the exclusiveness of the construction sector and receding well-being and work-life balance. The seminar will be followed by the AGM of the British office of European Institute for Construction Labour Research (CLR), which all are welcome to attend. It is also the occasion to present the latest CLR News (3/12 – www.clr-news.org) on *Diversity and Exclusion in Construction*.

Programme:

3.30-3.45pm: Tea/ coffee

3.45pm: Welcome: Linda Clarke (Chair)

3.45-5.45:

Valerie Francis (University of Melbourne): *Workers' work-family experiences in Australian construction*

Dr Fred Sherratt (University of Bolton): *Well-being and safety on sites*

Aletha Holborough (University of Westminster): *Transition, apprenticeships and ethnicity*

Dr Paul Chan (University of Manchester): *Diversity and Exclusion: What matters in construction?*

5.45-6.00 Pause

6.00-7.00: CLR GB AGM

7.00-7.30pm: Drinks

To Our Readers:

The CLR-GB Newsletter is the organ of exchange for CLR in Great Britain. This function depends on the co-operation of its readers. The editors ask everybody who is interested in construction labour to contribute with information and commentaries.

Please send your suggestions, articles, information, letters, etc. to

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