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# Impacts of urban regeneration on small business in preparation to host the Beijing 2022 winter Olympic games

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to analyse the impacts of the urban regeneration on small businesses in preparation to host the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games and the reactions of owners of such businesses toward the changes. This research focused on the effects of urban regeneration on small business located in the Olympic Green cluster of Beijing 2022, which has been the one with major changes. Owners of small businesses were interviewed two years before the Games. Whilst owners revealed that they have not taken part in the process of planning the urban regeneration, they have been willing to sacrifice their profits as a sign of patriotism. Meanwhile, they expressed their frustration with their no-right-to-the-city. The study applies the right-to-the-city theoretical framework to sport mega-event-led urban regeneration. The application of the theoretical framework transcends the case of Beijing 2022.

## KEYWORDS

Gentrification;  
social impacts;  
sport mega-event;  
right to the city

Beijing has undergone an urban regeneration to host the 2022 Winter Olympic Games (Xin and Kunzmann 2020). The regeneration involves not only the transformation of part of the city into a winter Olympic park, but also the creation of infrastructures to receive thousands of international athletes, officials, and visitors. In this study, we investigate how such transformations have affected the small business in the host area. Although small businesses have a fundamental socioeconomic importance in contemporary cities (Storey 2016), they have been almost ignored when governments and authorities make plans to regenerate spaces to host sport mega-events (Raco and Tunney 2010). The literature provides little information about the complex impacts that urban regeneration can have on local small businesses, with studies being limited to the context of London 2012 Olympic Games (Duignan 2019; Raco and Tunney 2010). The analysis of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games (hereinafter, Beijing 2022) case contributes to expand the knowledge about impacts of Olympic-led urban regeneration by explaining how Olympic preparation affects small businesses in the host city. This new knowledge has potential to inform the work of sport event organisers, sport mega-event guardians and host city managers.

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For the second time, after the 2008 Olympic Games, the Chinese government is using the Olympic Games as a catalyst for urban regeneration in Beijing (Xin and Kunzmann 2020; Deng et al. 2020). Urban regeneration is a government-led programme applied to redefine the use of the land in the city. Urban regeneration has happened in Beijing, more specifically in the Olympic Green cluster, where the renovated Beijing National Stadium (venue for the opening and closing ceremonies) and the new National Speed Skating Oval are located. In the same cluster, there are other important venues that have been renovated for the Games, such as the National Aquatics Centre (now the venue for curling) and the National Indoor Stadium (now the venue for ice hockey). This research focuses on the effects of urban regeneration on small business located in this cluster of Beijing 2022, which has been the one with major changes. In this research, we define small business as those that are locally developed and administrated, do not have branches, and do not have more than 50 employees.

The study draws upon the right to the city theoretical framework (Lefebvre 1996). The right to the city is not a right that citizens hold to have access to what already exists, but a right to decide about what to change (or not to change) based on their needs (Harvey 2008; Lefebvre 1996). According to the right to the city framework, residents of the city should have a voice in the process of urbanisation. In the last decades, in the process of preparation to host, managers of Olympic cities have applied the logic of neoliberalism, privileging the ideals of capital growth, competitiveness and globalisation (Masuda and Bookman 2018; Kennelly 2017). Neoliberalism seems to stand in opposition to the right that local citizens have, to live and possess the city (Marcuse, 2009; Purcell, 2002). In this research, we analyse if the same logic has been applied in Beijing for the second time and how this has affected a specific group of stakeholders – small business owners.

The literature has discussed the right to the city of alienated residents (Kennelly and Watt 2011; Watt 2013; Williamson 2017), but it has not applied the framework to investigate the right to the city of other stakeholders, such as small business owners. The purpose of this study was to analyse the impacts of the urban regeneration on small businesses in preparation to host the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games and the reactions of owners of such businesses toward the changes. In analysing the case, our aim is to expand and explain the use of the right to the city theoretical framework (Lefebvre, 1996) into the context of Olympic-led urban regeneration.

## Literature review

### *Olympic-led urban regeneration, neoliberalism and right to the city*

Urban regeneration has been promoted through programmes that redefine the use of city spaces. Olympic-led regeneration is a specific type of urban regeneration, where the redefinition aims to prepare a city to host the Olympic Games. Usually host cities require major transformations in many sites to receive a large number of visitors, attracted by the most mediatic sport event in the world. Therefore, Olympic-led regeneration transform the city not only by constructing new and large sport venues, but also by redefining the infrastructure of the city – including roads, streets, airports, ports, parks, and public transportation system.

Neoliberalism is defined as ‘a theory of political economic practices which proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, free markets and free trade’ (Harvey, 2006, p. 145). Applying the neoliberal logic, governments have used hosting opportunities to regenerate cities, favouring capital development, whilst alienating residents and local small businesses (Harvey 2006; Hall 2006; Raco and Tunney 2010). Neoliberalism has defined real estate developers and owners of large multinational businesses as winners in the Olympic-led urban regeneration; whilst the poor residents and local small businesses, as the losers (Kennelly 2017; Raco and Tunney 2010). The pattern of winners and losers has been the same in different cities, such as Beijing 2008 (Wang, Bao, and Lin 2015), Vancouver 2010 (VanWynsberghe, Kwan, and Van Lwijk 2011), London 2012 (Watt 2013), Sochi 2014 (Petersson, Vamling, and Yatsyk 2017) and Rio 2016 (Williamson 2017). In all these cases, less advantaged residents were displaced to create space for new real estate development and multinational businesses (Boykoff 2014). For instance, a recent systematic literature review showed that at least since Seoul 1988, more than 2 million people from less advantaged social classes have been removed from their houses due to Olympic-led gentrification (Rocha and Xiao 2022).

Although studies have been mainly conducted in the context of developed countries (mainly in the Global North, e.g., the UK), the literature has some studies in the context of the developing countries (in the Global South, e.g., Brazil). Rio 2016 followed neoliberalism to evict and displace poor residents with the aim of regenerating different areas of the city (Sanchez and Broudehoux 2013; Williamson 2017). In the pre-event stage, the Rio government established a “city of exception” (Vainer and Oliveira 2018), relaxing laws that protected housing rights of residents. The city of exception legitimised the use of exceptional strategies and actions, which accelerated the urban regeneration of specific areas of the city. On the one hand, private real estate firms were the major beneficiaries of the Rio Olympic-led regeneration. The government adopted a strategy of improving infrastructure of specific areas of the city linked to the Games (e.g., Barra da Tijuca, close to the Olympic Park) increasing the value of the land and facilitating the development of new projects (Gaffney 2016; Broudehoux and Sánchez 2015). On the other, disadvantaged residents and local businesses were the major victims of such regeneration. Figures show that more than 77,000 residents of poor areas were removed from their houses to create space for new real estate projects (Zimbalist 2017).

In the context of Delhi 2010 Commonwealth Games, neoliberal practices also dictated the transformation of the city. For example, the practices of slum demolitions and securitisation of the city have been closely related to hosting the Games (Sengupta 2017). Even the urban regeneration of Beijing in preparation for the 2008 Games has been somehow guided by principles of neoliberalism. For example, instituted. The Beijing Olympic Action Plan forced about 200 industrial enterprises located in the south-eastern industrial areas of the city to be relocated before the Games in 2008 (N. Wang et al. 2020).

A critical analysis shows that, in the context of sport mega-events, neoliberalism has adopted the principle of accumulation by dispossession (MacAloon 2016; Ren 2017; Harvey 2006). Harvey (2006) coined the term *accumulation by dispossession* to represent the main strategy of neoliberalism: Redistribution and transfer of wealth and income from the mass of population to the upper classes via state accumulation of capital. A popular way for the state to accumulate capital has been through the commodification and privatisation of land

(Harvey 2006). Sport mega-events have constituted one of the most common strategies to commodify and privatise lands. The gigantic size and the mediatic appeal of such events (mainly the Olympic Games) justify government investments in new venues and infrastructure (Smith 2012; Hall 2006). Private real estate firms often buy those areas with regenerated infrastructure (due to higher chances of developing profitable new projects) exemplifying how sport mega-events contribute to privatisation of the land. Although accumulation by dispossession can use different means, the use of the Olympic Games has become uniquely efficient to do so because it has forged a consensus around the urgent need of urban regeneration (Ren 2017; Vannuchi and Van Criekingen 2015).

Neoliberalism and its principles stand in opposition to the right local citizens have to live and possess the city (Marcuse 2009; Purcell 2002). The right to the city is a collective rather than an individual right, because changing the city should depend on the collective power over the process of urbanisation (Harvey 2008). In theory, residents obtain the right to the city, when governments acknowledge the collective power of communities and listen to their preferences and priorities before making decisions about urban changes. Therefore, collective power shape urbanisation only when governments acknowledge the legitimacy of the collective power of communities in the city. In the right to the city framework, an important tenet is the idea that residents of the city should have a voice in the process of urban transformations. Nevertheless, in many places around the world, we have seen the opposite. The right to the city has been confined in the hands of political and economic elites, who shape the city after their own particular neoliberal desires (Harvey 2008). Therefore, the right to the city has become both a cry and a demand (Marcuse 2009). The cry comes from those superficially integrated into the system and constrained in their opportunities to grow and pursue personal development (e.g., the working class). The demand comes from those directly oppressed (e.g., evicted or displaced people).

Research in the context of the Olympic Games has shown that urban regeneration has superficially integrated and directly oppressed local residents of the host cities (Watt 2013; Horne 2018; Williamson 2017; Kennelly and Watt 2011). However, the right to the city framework has been narrowly applied in the context of sport mega-events. Conceptual articles have proposed that the Olympic-led urban regeneration reinforces the principles of neoliberalism and denies the right to the city to many different groups (Hall 2006; Maiello and Pasquinelli 2015). Few empirical articles have applied the concept to marginalised residents (Kennelly and Watt 2011), but none to other groups of stakeholders such as the small business owners.

### ***Impacts of London 2012 urban regeneration on small business***

In the context of Olympic urban regeneration, small businesses have received little research attention, limited to the context of London 2012. Raco and Tunney (2010) investigated small businesses that existed in the site of the London 2012 Olympic Village. According to the UK's Companies Act 2006, a small business is the one that does not have a turnover of more than £5.6 million net and does not have more than 50 employees (UKPGA 2006). In Raco and Tunney's (2010) study, examples of small business include companies in the manufacturing, wholesale, car repair and transport sectors. They described how the eviction of small business was seen as necessary for the construction of a new highly visible and gentrified commercial area in East London. Raco and Tunney (2010) found that, between

2007 and 2008, the London city council compulsorily purchased and ‘actively transferred’ 201 small business from the area where the Olympic Park was to be built. The transfers represented financial losses for the relocated businesses because the location of the sites to where they were moved created access troubles for customers, employees, and suppliers. For instance, the owner of a small printing firm affirmed that 80% of their clients lived within a 2-mile radius, thus, moving to far-away locations would create access troubles for their clients and, ultimately, was likely to imply in losing such clients. The clearance did not go uncontested. Several small businesses adopted a reflexive strategy of making themselves more visible to call attention to the unfair treatment they were receiving. However, Raco and Tunney (2010) concluded that the global appeal of the Olympic Games made their lives very difficult and created a ‘public-interest’ justification for their evictions. The study illustrated how small business owners had no right to the city during the 2012 London Olympic-led urban regeneration.

Duignan (2019) investigated the London 2012 Olympic legacy with a focus on the role of small businesses in the hosting area. Interviewing local business owners and authorities, he found that direct and indirect (usually via raising commercial rents) displacement of local businesses created a negative legacy for the city. He highlighted the city council indifference to the loss of diversity among businesses in the site. In the Olympic-led urban regeneration of East London, a new business demographic – monochromatic global chains – replaced a diverse range of local businesses. Diversity of business has been described as beneficial and expected for development of local economy and for satisfaction of local consumers (Wrigley and Lambiri 2014). Duignan (2019) concluded that, by displacing local businesses, the Olympic legacy fails to recognise the central role local communities play in collectively contributing to local identity and strengthening the cultural offer. Collecting data after the Games, Duignan (2019) confirmed the predictions of Raco and Tunney (2010), whose data collected before the Games indicated negative legacies for the city because of displacement of small businesses.

### **Context: Late-socialist China**

The context of the current investigation is the late-socialist People’s Republic of China, which has been defined as a market opened immature democracy (Coase and Wang 2012). Deng Xiaoping, the architect of modern China, proposed a socialism with Chinese characteristics, where market economy and planning economy could co-exist. This still defines the late-socialist China, which has been the second largest economy in the world since 2010. The current openness of China has created concerns in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the sole party in power since 1949. The modern history shows that, since the 1990s, the CCP has used different tactics to educate people about the importance of patriotism to overcome the ‘past humiliation’ caused by western and Japanese incursions in the country (Wang 2008; Hoffman 2006). The historical consciousness of the country seems to be shaped by the period between mid-1800s and mid-1900s when China was attacked and dominated by imperialists. Examples of tactics used by the CCP to educate people about the importance of patriotism include an history education introduced in the Chinese educational system and national campaigns of “patriotic education” (e.g., through free distribution of films about the greatness of the CCP) (Wang 2008). According to the CCP, patriotism involves making sacrifices for your country, ‘to put an end to the past humiliations’ of China (Wang, 2008, p. 804).

In late-socialist China, the rise of private property rights and the economic growth have been considered products of neoliberalism (Weber 2018; Coase and Wang 2012). Scholars argue that China has developed intriguing similarities with western nations because of the use of neoliberalism to guide, at least partially, political and economic practices in the country (Weber 2018; Hoffman 2006). Hoffman (2006) proposes that Chinese citizens currently have more freedom to make autonomous choices and to express themselves; however, autonomous choices are still aligned with notions of loyalty and patriotism.

The case of Beijing 2022 can add information on how the context can explain the use neoliberal practices in Olympic-led urban regeneration. Neoliberalism in China does not occur in a post-ideological vacuum; rather, it happens in a context where the CCP is still in power and socialism is the regime (Lim 2014). Whilst Chinese government has reproduced elements of neoliberalism in its territory, this should be analysed considering the context of negotiation between neoliberalism and socialism, which have been considered oppositional forces (Lim 2014; Harvey 2005). This is what Harvey (2005) calls a 'neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics'. An example of this neoliberalism can be found on how the government has increasingly allowed real-estate development in big cities, but they still control most of resources (e.g., through state banks) necessary to carry out such development (Duckett 2020). We investigated whether the neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics differ from 'western' neoliberalism when used to guide the Olympic urban regeneration. In preparing a city to host the Games, neoliberalism has stood in opposition to the right to city of citizens in democratic countries (Boykoff 2014; Gaffney 2016; Kennelly and Watt 2011). Now, the present investigation explores this relationship in the context of a not-mature democracy.

## Methodology

### *Procedures and participants*

We follow Denscombe's (2014) guidelines to analyse the case Beijing 2022 urban regeneration. The purpose of the case study was theory-led, as we use it as an illustration of how a particular theoretical background applies in a real-life setting (Yin 2014). The case of Beijing 2022 has the characteristics of a valuable case (Denscombe 2014; Yin 2014): the case has a distinctive identity, it is a 'naturally' occurring phenomenon (i.e., there is no manipulation, the investigated situation existed before and still existed after the research), and it allows the researchers to investigate relationships and processes. In analysing the case, our aim was to expand and explain the relationship between neoliberalism and the right to the city framework (Lefebvre 1996) into the context of Olympic urban regeneration in a socialist country. This indicates a potential to analytic generalisation, which aims to expand and generalise the application of theories in different contexts (Denscombe 2014; Yin 2013). Findings from the case should be transferable to other Olympic cases, considering that host cities share multiple features among them (Muñoz 2006; Gold and Gold 2016). To strengthen the validity of our case, we discuss plausible rival explanations (alternative factors that might explain the results) (Yin 2013). Case study and qualitative data analysis suit the aim of this research – analysing the impacts of the urban regeneration on small businesses in preparation to host the Beijing 2022 – as they provide a scientific methodology to investigate a naturally occurred phenomenon in depth.

Data were collected in June/July 2020, eighteen months before the Beijing 2022, but after most of the urban regeneration in preparation for the event was finished. We chose small businesses in retail, hospitality, and catering, due to the high density of such business in the host area. The high density of those business was confirmed by one of the authors after checking business directories of the region and visiting the area multiple times. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. Interviews have the advantages of capturing rich details and being flexible, despite the drawback of a possible influence of the context in the participants' answers (Qu and Dumay 2011). We addressed this possible drawback by analysing plausible rival explanations, where we consider the socio-political-economic context of China.

After getting ethics approval, the interviewer (one of the authors) contacted the business owners by telephone and invited them for an interview. The ethics committee expressed no concern regarding translations because one of the authors is Chinese and speak English fluently. At the time of data collection, Beijing was encouraging social distance due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, rather than face-to-face, phone interviews were conducted using WeChat (the most used video-audio chat tool in China). To define the number of interviews, we applied the principle of theoretical saturation, which is the point where no new information can be observed in the data (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson 2006). The interviews were conducted with 14 local owners (Table 1) of businesses in the Olympic Green cluster. The interview scripts had a few broad questions to allow participants to express their own perspectives about urban regeneration in their businesses area. Examples of questions include: Can you tell me about your business? From 2013 to 2015 [the bidding period for the 2022 Winter Olympics Games] how was your business? What about after 2015 until today [after Beijing won the bid]? When the government start building the new Olympics facilities [the National Speed Skating Oval and the Shougang Ski Jumping Venue], did your business get effected? How?

### Data analysis

Interviews were voice recorded and fully transcribed in Mandarin; then, transcriptions were translated to English. We used NVivo 12 to undertake an iterative coding exercise and identify key themes. We analysed the data using inductive thematic analysis because we

**Table 1.** Characteristics of participants.

Interviewee (pseudonymous)	Years in business	Gender	Type of business
Wei	10	Male	Catering
Qiang	6	Male	Hospitality
Fang	3	Female	Hospitality
Jun	4	Male	Catering
Jong	6	Male	Hospitality
Jie	5	Male	Catering
Na	8	Female	Retail
Cheng	11	Male	Catering
Min	9	Female	Retail
Daquan	7	Male	Catering
Bao	9	Female	Catering
Hung	2	Male	Retail
Jian	4	Male	Hospitality
Kun	6	Male	Catering

were looking for patterns in the data (i.e., themes) that could explain the impacts of the urban regeneration on small businesses. We followed the six steps of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, we started with immersion in the data, through intensive reading and generated initial codes. There were a large number of initial codes. Examples of topics in the most common codes include increase in the number of people in the region, disruption by construction, difficulties to have access to the business, reactions to changes in the area, expectations for the future. The authors did the two first steps independently. Then, we generated potential themes based on the commonality of codes across the transcripts. Finally, we examined consistency and representativeness of themes for the data array and named them.

## Results and discussion

Interviews revealed positive and negative impacts of urban regeneration in Beijing. Whilst the positive impacts were limited in number and scope and perceived only by owners of retail and catering shops, the negative impacts were more frequently reported by all participants of this research. We grouped their reactions into two themes: sacrifice as a sign of patriotism and no right to the city. Although not directly associated with urban regeneration impacts, some owners mentioned the problems that COVID-19 pandemic has caused to their business. Considering this is not the focus of the current research, we decided not to explore this any further. We believe it is important to report that owners seemed totally capable of discerning the impacts of urban regeneration from the impacts of the pandemic, mainly because most of the regeneration happened before the pandemic.

### *Impacts of urban regeneration led by Beijing 2022*

An increased number of workers in the region was pointed as the key factor to positive impacts. For example, Wei (male, retail) said that, '[...] during the construction, many workers used to come to consume here, most of the construction workers used to come to our small shop, which is affordable'. Cheng (male, catering) suggested that the positive impact from construction workers has been extended. He attributed this to new people coming to the area: '[...] it [urban regeneration] was a good thing for this area. I have had much more customers since they began to regenerate this area. The constructors and labours used to come here to eat, and now more people started to visit here'.

Most of the urban regeneration in preparation for Beijing 2022 was finished by the time of data collection (June/July 2020), but the area still had an increased number of finishing workers, who used to consume in the local area. Therefore, Cheng's perception that different people start visiting the area may still be related to the influx of workers in the region.

The literature reports positive impacts of regeneration in host areas as short-lived impacts, caused mainly by construction workers (Baade and Matheson 2016; Khraiche and Alakshendra 2021). Baade and Matheson (2016) say that the local economy of host cities usually has two short-run boosts: the first one during the construction phase (due to an influx of workers in the area) and the second one from tourism during the Games. Economic positive impacts in host areas have been not sustained after the event (Zimbalist 2017). In the long run, construction jobs are gone, and visitors are not enough to keep the same level

of consumption in the hosting area (Khraiche and Alakshendra 2021). Our data from Beijing do not allow us to go further in this point.

Owners of catering and retail shops located close to the facilities mentioned some observed negative impacts of Olympic urban regeneration. Most of the owners complained about traffic, parking, and accessibility to their businesses. Catering sector suffered with road closures and construction because they need to deliver food. In all three sectors, owners agree that the urban regeneration created a big disruption to their business implying in financial loss. Min (female, retail) reported the problem that construction caused to her business: ‘The construction blocked some main roads, and it was just in front of my shop, so nobody could see my place.’

In the hospitality sector, owners had important negative impacts to report. Jong (male, hospitality) said:

The construction prevented the costumers to come because it was noisy and dusty in the air out there when they were building [...] even if we cleaned the places more times than usual, the number of complaints that we received from our customers have skyrocketed during that period. We have had customers who asked us to change their bed sheets twice a day [...] they called in the middle of the night asking to change rooms and checked out the next day.

The negative impacts are in line with previous research. During Olympic-led urban regeneration, businesses and residents that are closer to new Olympic facilities tend to experience most of the negative impacts from construction (Weimar and Rocha 2019; Raco and Tunney 2010). Weimar and Rocha (2019) described that the closer residents were from the new venues of Rio 2016, the less likely they were to support the Olympic Games because they had suffered most of the negative impacts of urban regeneration. Likewise, Duignan (2019) reported that small businesses close to the construction areas in the Olympic park of London 2012 suffered most of the negative impacts of urban regeneration.

Raco and Tunney (2010) show that urban regeneration to prepare a city to host Olympic Games can seriously damage the competitiveness of small businesses. They assert that usually politicians and local authorities do not pay attention to small businesses, because they are considered as ‘collections of “old-fashioned”, uncompetitive firms whose decline is inevitable’ (Raco and Tunney, 2010, p. 2010). They reported that small businesses in London certainly had their competitiveness profoundly affected by the Olympic-led urban regeneration. In the case of Beijing 2022, Jong’s quotation above illustrates that the competitiveness of small business in the hospitality sector has been heavily affected. Whilst the local hotels are struggling to survive, international corporations are building nine five-star and 12 four-star new hotels in the host region of Beijing 2022 (Gillen 2020). The replacement of local hotels by international chain hotels is likely to have long term impacts in the region. Besides the loss of community sense (Watt 2013), this replacement indicates that most of the increased earnings in the hospitality sector will not remain in the community, as internationally owned hotels will send profits abroad (Baade and Matheson 2016).

The urban regeneration has had a negative impact on profitability and competitiveness of small business in other sectors as well. Daquan (male, catering) said, ‘[...] I started cutting my spending, both personal spending and business spending. It helped me to get through the urban regeneration.’ Many owners of small businesses mentioned that increases in rent have been critical. They acknowledged that having a business in the area was never cheap,

but after the urban regeneration the problem of rent cost became worse. When asked about the major impacts the urban regeneration had had on her business, Na (female, retail) said:

Firstly, the rent. Renting always costs a lot in Beijing and it keeps increasing. I have paid a lot for rent and utilities, and it keeps rising, but after the development of infrastructure, the bills went up very fast, much faster than before.

Rent has been reported in the literature as a major problem for small businesses in Olympic regenerated areas (Kavetsos 2012; Duignan 2019; Raco and Tunney 2010). Duignan (2019) found that rising rents led to business unsustainability in the host area of London 2012. Results of his research indicate that organisers and local authorities do not recognise small business as a key stakeholder in the process of hosting Olympic Games. Therefore, the replacement of high street small business by shopping centres and global chains is taken as an unavoidable market force. In other words, applying a neoliberal logic, they seem not to care if owners of small business cannot pay their rents after regeneration.

The neoliberalism has been the main policy in Olympic-led urban regeneration at least for the last two decades (Smith 2012; Müller and Gaffney 2018). Our results show that the situation has not been different in Beijing 2022. We do not know how many of those businesses will survive the rising rents if there is no increase in the number of consumers after the event. Results of previous Games are not very encouraging for Beijing, as the host cities do not experience an increased influx of visitors after the event (Baade and Matheson, 2016; Zimbalist, 2017). The fact the owners were already suffering the impact of rising rents is a matter of concern because the Games were two years away.

A factor that might increase the survival rate of small businesses in Beijing is the previous experience with Olympic-led urban regeneration in 2008. Unlike London and other recent hosts, Beijing is passing for the second urban regeneration to host the Olympic Games in the last 20 years. Owners have mentioned the previous experience with regeneration to host the 2008 Games as an important tool for survival. For example, Fang (female, hospitality) explained how she planned to survive the urban regeneration in Beijing:

I saw and heard what happened to the shops near to the Olympic Park – how they suffered from money shortage during the period of Beijing 2008, when the authorities were building facilities [...] so when we heard about the 2022 Olympic Games, my partner and I started saving money and waiting for the changes to come.

This indicates that the government has been applying the neoliberal agenda again to prepare the city for the 2022 Games. Previous experiences may help small businesses to survive, not because the government cares about them, but because they have invested their own resources to cope with the changes. The case of Beijing 2022 supports previous critiques, which showed how small businesses have been ignored during the process of planning and execution of Olympic-led urban regeneration (Raco and Tunney 2010; Duignan 2019; Poynter, Viehoff, and Li 2015).

The extreme act of neoliberal policy in the context of sport mega-events is eviction. Whilst Olympic-led evictions usually affect poor and vulnerable residents in host cities (Suzuki, Ogawa, and Inaba 2018; Faulhaber and Azevedo 2015; Rocha and Xiao 2022), they can also affect businesses. Raco and Tunney (2010) described that more than 200 small businesses in east London were evicted to create space for the new Olympic Park. In the

current study, a small business owner in Beijing reported that some evictions have happened. Qiang (male, hospitality) said, ‘They just demolished some places in the host areas, but I am ok, because mine was not involved in the relocation plans of the local government’. We have not found more information about the ‘relocation’ plan. Small business owners were not willing to talk more about this and even less about evictions, which proved to be a sensitive topic.

### ***Reactions of owners of small business to cope with regeneration impacts***

Owners of small businesses in Beijing 2022 host area have reacted in different ways to the negative impacts of urban regeneration. Most of the owners have adopted compliant behaviours, supporting the government decisions, at least initially. Such behaviours are different from those adopted by small business owners in London 2012, where the owners adopted reflexive behaviours to make themselves more visible during the regeneration process (Duignan 2019; Raco and Tunney 2010). Apparently, this helped them to bring publicity to the treatment they were receiving and to guarantee better deals with the government. The compliance of owners in Beijing produced two types of reactions that shed new light on the relationship between small businesses and government during the process of Olympic-led urban regeneration. First, they reacted expressing willingness to sacrifice as a sign of patriotism. Owners perceived that they should support the government, even if this requires a certain level of personal sacrifice. Second, they noted that they have no right to the city, reacting with frustration.

#### ***Sacrifice as a sign of patriotism***

Some owners reported financial losses as a necessary sacrifice to see the country succeeding in hosting a sport mega-event. Bao (female, catering) said, ‘Well, as long as it [financial loss] is affordable, it is my pleasure to make a sacrifice for our country’. Some owners who had earlier expressed some positive impacts of urban regeneration, later said that they also had to make sacrifices. For instance, Wei (male, catering) explained that, ‘At that time [when constructions started], the business was a little worse. But there is no way, [we] just [need] to contribute to the country [...], development always comes at a price’. Others understand that the sacrifice is worthy because it will show a stronger China to the world. As Jian (male, hospitality) put, ‘We must fully support the hosting of such a large-scale event that allows the world to see China. I think this as a contribution to our country’.

The initial reactions of the owners to cope with negative impacts of regenerations show how they relate with the government. The CCP has invested in the discourse of a ‘new and rejuvenating’ China, which represents the idea of giving new vigour to the country to overcome the past humiliation. According to the CCP, rejuvenating the country depends on the patriotism of Chinese people and allegiance to the country (Z. Wang 2008). One of Daquan’s (male, catering) quotations illustrates how patriotism is understood as allegiance to the government, and how this allegiance leads to the acceptance of what has been proposed to the city: ‘it [urban regeneration] is a national decision, we must support it. I am a Chinese man, and China is my country’. Most of the participants agree with this perspective. They have seen much more negative than positive impacts for their businesses during the urban

regeneration of Beijing. At the same time, they have shown a compliant behaviour, associated with their perception of necessary sacrifice to support the country.

Whilst small business owners in London 2012 were not willing to make sacrifices as a sign of patriotism, they were willing to make sacrifices because of expected benefits for their businesses. Raco and Tunney (2010) reported that, at least at the beginning, some small business in East London were willing to support the urban regeneration to prepare the place to host the 2012 Games, even if this had some temporary detrimental impact on their business. The main reason for this support was the expectation of a better business environment in the future. Raco and Tunney (2010) informed that the support did not last long in London, fading away when local businesses owners noticed that very little would be for the benefit of their businesses. In Beijing, the support has lasted longer.

### ***No right to the city***

Despite the still-strong influence of Maoist ideals (mainly the unique importance of state) and notions of patriotism as sacrifice, the late socialist Chinese government has seen a rise in autonomous thinking among Chinese people (Hoffman 2006). Despite showing some willingness to sacrifice their businesses for the country, small business owners expressed their concerns that they have no right to the city. For instance, when asked about the urban regeneration to prepare for the Games, Min (female, retail) said, '[...] nobody was thinking about me. They should have asked me first. I mean, I do not own the public area, I know that, but I am a citizen of this country'. Similarly, Fang (female, hospitality) expressed that being the host of the next Olympics and the urban regeneration have not been good for her:

Not for me, but for the country. It [the Olympic Games] has proved that our country is making progress. For us, little ones, Olympics has ambushed us. [...] We've been told that some construction would start to improve the infrastructure and transportation system here. They have not asked me my opinion. I do not think it matters anyway.

Other participants expressed the same feeling that their opinions do not matter. As Min and Fang, they not only reported a fact – that the city does not belong to them – but they also expressed frustration with this fact. Wei (male, catering) recognises that the urban regeneration policy does not consider the opinion of people of the city: 'I don't think that we, small business owners, have anything to do with it [urban regeneration policy]. The government will do what they think is the best for the people, and I must accept it. It depends on how lucky you are'. The small businesses at the host areas were informed about days and times when construction would start and the inconvenience they might have. However, they have not had a chance to raise any demand or concern about how the changes could affected them and their businesses. They have not had right to the city.

The frustration Chinese owners expressed from the fact that they have no right to the city confirms Hoffman's (2006) arguments that late-socialist China has developed intriguing similarities with neoliberal regimes. Hoffman proposes that patriotism and neoliberal practices are now intertwined in China, creating what she calls patriotic professionals – Chinese who are patriotic but have developed a cosmopolitan and professional view of their country. In the literature, this type of behaviour had been observed in university students and young professionals who moved abroad to study and came back to China (Nyíri, Zhang, and Varrall 2010; Shi et al. 2017). Therefore, the findings of the current investigation are somehow

surprising, because the participants do not fit in these categories. The results seem to indicate that even people who never left the country started expressing some frustration with the fact that their voices are not heard. Coase and Wang (2012) offered an explanation for the freedom of speech of owners of small businesses presented in the current study. They say that, since the economic reform in the 1980s, marginal forces such as private farming and small entrepreneurs have enjoyed increasing freedom to express themselves because the state does not consider them as a threat to the system.

Marcuse (2009) noted that Lefebvre's right to the city is both a demand (from those directly oppressed) and a cry (from those superficially integrated into the system but constrained in their opportunities to prosper). Our findings show that the owners have started a cry for their right to the city, against the urban regeneration of Beijing in preparation for the 2022 Olympic Games. Our results show some similarity with those from Western countries (Duignan 2019; Raco and Tunney 2010), indicating that small businesses have been excluded from decision making involving the Olympic urban regeneration no matter the socio-political context. Therefore, in the context of the Olympic urban regeneration, the neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics (Harvey 2005) does not differ from 'western' neoliberalism. All around the world, wherever the Olympics hit the ground, neoliberalism is a common strategy and the right to city of citizens has not been respected.

## Conclusions

Beyond the Olympic urban regeneration, plausible rival explanations for the awareness and frustration of owners in Beijing for not having a right to the city include an economic crisis and the socio-political context. Since 2015, China's gross domestic product has grown more than 6% annually, making China the world's fastest-growing economy (The World Bank, 2021). Beijing is one of the most vivid commercial centres in the country; among other big cities in the country, it is classified in tier 1, which indicates a mature economy (Long and Huang 2019). Therefore, the assumption that an economic crisis has hit the city during the pre-event time seems unappealing. Regarding the socio-political context, China is officially a socialist consultative democracy, but in practice the country still lives under an authoritarian regime dictated by the CCP (He and Warren 2017). This plausible rival explanation might partially explain why small business owners perceive they have no right to the city. However, this is also likely to be associated with recent urban regeneration carried out to prepare the city to host the 2022 Olympic Games. When we compare Beijing with other Olympic host cities (Duignan 2019; Raco and Tunney 2010), we note that, in different socio-political contexts, small businesses have been denied the right to the city during Olympic regeneration. In the current study, to report problems of no right to the city, owners consistently referred to Beijing 2008 Games, indicating some correlation between hosting Olympic Games and the problem.

Urban regeneration of Olympic cities has disregarded the interdependency between small businesses and the places where they operate, generating multiple negative impacts in host areas. Small businesses have suffered with displacement or relocation, because they have significant difficulties to replicate customer and supplier networks in other sites (Ferm 2016). Disrupting such networks may have a devastating effect on business' competitiveness affecting the lives of their owners and workers (Raco and Tunney, 2010). The case of Beijing 2022 illustrated how owners of small business have reacted to the de-construction of their

networks. Initially, they behaved with compliance toward the government decisions. Sacrifice as patriotism has been their argument to accept the urban regeneration without previous consultation. Then, they perceived that they have no right to the city, which came in tandem with frustration. Although owners of small businesses in Beijing have not adopted a reflexive strategy of making themselves more visible during the regeneration process, as owners of small businesses in London did, the awareness and frustration with their no right to the city is the same.

The application and adaptation of the right to the city framework to the context of sport mega-events brings a theoretical advancement to the field. The literature shows that urban regeneration does not necessarily lead to 'no right to the city' to local residents and businesses (Purcell 2002; Marcuse 2009). On the contrary, well planned urban regeneration can promote the right to city for locals (Colantonio and Dixon 2011; Granger 2017). The key element in well-planned urban regeneration has been willingness to listen to and involve local people before, during and after the process (Granger 2017). Involvement of small business owners was not observed either in the current study in Beijing or in past studies in London (Duignan 2019; Raco and Tunney 2010). The exclusion of small business owners from planning and discussing urban regeneration projects has denied them the right to the city in Olympic cities. The process of exclusion in Olympic cities has obliterated distinctions between eastern and western countries (Lefebvre 1996; Harvey 2008).

The first limitation of the study comes from the use of data from one sample at one moment. The participants may change their opinions after certain time because urban regeneration is a dynamic process. We tried to mitigate such limitation by conducting the interviews when most of the urban regeneration was finished. Ideally, future studies may consider, budget permitting, a longitudinal study, where changes in perceptions and evaluations can be investigated. Second, the moment of the interviews coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic. Although owners seemed capable of discerning impacts of urban regeneration from impacts of the pandemic, we should acknowledge that the pandemic might have increased the negativity of some owners. When analysing the data, we paid close attention to any mention to the pandemic, as an attempt to avoid interferences of this fact on their evaluations about the urban regeneration. Third, the number of participants and the type of small businesses were limited. Whilst we followed literature guidance to define the number of interviewees and the type of businesses (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson 2006; McGillivray, Duignan, and Mielke 2019), interviews with owners of other types of businesses might add some new information. Future studies may consider the use of different local businesses to see if they differ in their perceptions and evaluations about Olympic urban regeneration.

The sample-to-population generalisation cannot be claimed. However, the use of analytical generalisation seems to be well established in the literature as a suitable method in case study research (Yin 2013). The current study can claim some analytic generalisation (Denscombe 2014), as it tested the expansion of the right to the city theoretical framework into a new a context – Olympic host city urban regeneration – and found that it can be applied to different host cities, after comparing our results with the literature (Duignan 2019; Raco and Tunney 2010; Freeman and Burgos 2017). Future studies should investigate the impacts of urban regeneration in other host cities. This is the first research conducted in a non-European context. Advancing the knowledge demands more investigations in other socio-political and cultural contexts.

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