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# **In the shadow of sport mega-events: A critical analysis of the nexus between evictions, displacements, securitized gentrification and children's rights**

**Abstract:** This paper explores what has been described as the 'dark side' of sport mega-events – namely, processes of gentrification and mega-event induced human evictions and displacements. Whilst researchers have established the regularity of such practices before and during sport mega-events, and that children inevitably are among the displaced, this research has, hitherto, seldom been synthesized within the broader children's rights context. In doing so, this conceptual paper critically examines children's rights issues that arise from Olympic induced evictions and displacements. We argue that, from a children's rights perspective, the consequences of these practices impact upon children, young people, and their rights in a much more pervasive and deep-seated manner, affecting multiple children's rights, including their right to housing, education, and the best interests principle. This paper drives forward debates in the social study of sport mega-events, children's rights and on urban processes and their social exclusions.

**Key words:** *Olympics, mega-events, children's rights, securitization, gentrification, displacements.*

## **Introduction**

This paper explores the core invidious phenomenon of human displacement that regularly occurs in the *shadows* of spectacular sport mega-events taking place across different locations worldwide. Specifically, it does so by interrogating the wider socio-legal significance which such practices have on children's rights, pursuant to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) (hereon: CRC). Except for the United States of America, the CRC has been ratified by every country in the world and, although imperfect, it remains a crucial international legal instrument that recognizes the human rights of children. Whilst the diverse, social effects of sport mega-event induced displacements are documented elsewhere (Broudehoux, 2009, Horne, 2007; Suzuki et al., 2018), what has evaded comparable academic scrutiny has been the impact of such displacements upon the rights of children and young people. Indeed, it has been determined that the effects of such displacements on 'the enjoyment of the right to adequate housing for all is [...] less clear' (UN, 2009: para 9), rendering this one important area to analyse critically. This article contends that – from a children's rights perspective – the social consequences of evictions and displacements on children, young people, and their rights is much more pervasive and deep-seated in its outworkings. Crucially, mega-event induced evictions and displacements therefore affect multiple children's rights – notably, the right to housing, education, and the child's best interests principle.

From a social scientific perspective, this contention is important. Boykoff (2024) recently argued that critical academic work on sport mega-events like the Olympic Games and the football World Cup remain both necessary and important in the face of the structural issues that define the 21<sup>st</sup> century, including rising inequality, ‘turbo-charged gentrification’ and ‘escalating homelessness’. Particularly, Boykoff observes how the Olympics play a role in this; ‘in part through their tendency to turbo-charge gentrification and displacement, the main drivers of homelessness’ (p. 3). Following Boykoff’s lead, this article will explore these sociologically and legally significant processes further and, specifically, it examines the impacts of eviction and displacement practices on the rights of children and young people, arising from the organization of the Olympics. This remains necessary as equally situated across the academic literature is the negligible examination of the effects of sport mega-events from a children’s rights perspective (Brackenridge et al, 2015). Yet, the neglect of children’s rights is, of course, not limited to the world of sport mega-events and, equally, paying attention to children’s rights in the context of displacements or evictions remains crucial more generally, although this article in itself, deploys the mega-event context as one *exemplar* which, as shown, amplifies or renders such neglect more visible. Indeed, given that the Olympics remains the largest mega-event globally, often involving the disbursement of national finances which vastly exceed original estimations (Boykoff, 2024), the extent to which children's rights are considered within such momentous national decision-making processes becomes a source of concern.

Whilst eviction and displacement practices are known to occur, especially as part of the Olympic preparations – and now comprise a ‘defining feature of the mega-event’ (Porter et al., 2009) – few attempts have been made to discuss their impacts upon children and young people within this context. This, despite the fact, as acknowledged by Twyford and Grant (2023) that mega-events often have detrimental consequences for children. Stories of the socio-spatial exclusion of children and young people in the context of previous Olympic Games, including the Vancouver and London Olympic editions, are not a new phenomenon (Kennelly, 2016; Kennelly and Watt, 2011). Moreover, the more recent cases of Rio de Janeiro 2016 (Talbot, 2024) and Tokyo 2021 (Suzuki et al., 2018) underpin this further, while reports of evictions and ‘clean-up’ operations in Paris ahead of the 2024 Olympic Games, all of which impact several vulnerable social groups, including children, have abounded with increasing frequency (*The Independent*, 2024). Such evidence suggests that respect for children’s rights, which includes the fundamental ‘best interests’ principle is not always protected – or adhered to –

when host cities prepare for influxes of spectators, athletes, the global media (and capital), and wider commercial sponsors, in advance of Olympic editions.

Hence, this article builds heavily upon the social scientific work of Boykoff (2024), Kennelly (2016, 2022), and Kennelly and Watt (2011) to critically unpack the inter-connections between processes of gentrification, securitization, and displacements at mega-events from a socio-legal children's rights perspective. Crucially, this literature-based article *extends* these insights by systematically engaging with the extant literature and legal frameworks on children's rights by centring our discussion around the research question of: What are the children's rights-related issues arising from Olympic Games induced evictions and displacements?

By shedding a light on Olympic-induced evictions and displacement in the context of securitization and gentrification processes, this paper raises important questions speaking to the best interest principle; children's right to housing and the knock-on effects that it exerts on the right to education. Hence, if researching mega-events – as Boykoff (2024: 8) posited – allows social researchers to 'critically engage with the world's most burning questions', then this article contributes not only to the study of sport mega-events' politics, their very real harms (Talbot, 2021) and '*dark sides*' (cf. Smith, 2012); but also to the wider intersection of children's rights and discourses surrounding urban exclusion and its politics and processes.

### **Conceptual and historical unpacking: Celebration capitalism, securitized gentrification and displacements**

In June 2024, with only two months to go before the Paris 2024 Olympics in Paris, *The Independent* (2024) reported that thousands of homeless people had been evicted by the police throughout the French capital 'as part of "clean-up" operation ahead of the Olympics'. On the civil society level, this was heavily criticized by campaigners claiming it constituted an example of the 'social cleansing' of vulnerable groups to ensure Paris appeared 'in the most flattering light possible' during the Olympics. Importantly, these reports followed similar stories published a few months earlier when French police carried out evictions at a 'makeshift camp' in the suburb *Vitry-sur-Seine* (Adamson, 2024).

Reports of this kind, as unpacked here, are not unique in the context of cities preparing for the Olympics. As we argue, sociologically they may be made sense of through the occasionally related concepts of gentrification and securitization, and the Olympics' commercial and urban politics. Whilst the Olympic Games and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) (as the Olympics' franchise owners) have struggled, in recent years, to find a critical mass of

interested, entrepreneurial and potential host cities (Lauermann, 2022), the Olympics' size and scale still remains monumental. Hence, its social, spatial, and economic footprints, on cities who end up hosting the Games, are immense.

For four decades (see Boykoff, 2020), neoliberal cities have invested in sport to boost urban renewal and regeneration (John and McDonald, 2020). There is a long history of global cities using the Olympics for urban regeneration programmes and purposes; whilst simultaneously adhering to the strict conditions from the IOC's regulations and charter. Consequently, several academics have pointed out how the attempts to reorganize spaces within host cities and commonly make cities (and spaces within them) more 'presentable' and attractive for influxes of more affluent consumers, tourists, commercial partners and other social groups, have consistently occurred prior to, and during, the staging of the Olympics (e.g., Boykoff, 2024; Suzuki et al., 2018; Gaffney, 2016; Talbot, 2021; John and McDonald, 2020).

The processes surrounding the Olympic preparation may be seen, therefore, in the context of 'gentrification' (Gaffney, 2016; Watt, 2013) which, despite its contested meanings, usually involves 'a change in the population of land-users such that the new users are of a higher socio-economic status than the previous users, together with an associated reinvestment of fixed capital' (Clark, 2005: 258). Notwithstanding, researchers have demonstrated how such processes are, not uncommonly, followed by eviction and displacement – or as Horne (2015) writes, the 'replacement' – of populations as residential upgrades mean lower-income residents are directly or indirectly pressured out of their homes and neighbourhoods through, for example, demolitions, evictions, elevated rental charges, or through changes to neighbourhood facilities (Watt, 2013).

Because such processes have continually occurred in cities prior to their hosting of the Olympics, it is possible to speak of a '*mega-event-induced nexus of displacement and gentrification*' commonly occurring alongside the processes of securitization which characterize modern-day mega-events (Boykoff, 2024: 111, emphasis added). Here, as Giulianotti and Klauser (2010) write, security-related policies and policing tactics are thus reinforcing the ordering of urban spaces and utilized to justify the 'clearing of specific "undesirable" or "unloved" populations' (p. 54) from mega-event spaces. For example, Giulianotti et al. (2015a: 135) note that security and policing strategies prior to the London 2012 Olympics – including curfews on young people (under 16s) and dispersal zones, meant that, 'for many young people, the Olympic area had become a forbidden space'. Furthermore,

securitization processes often go hand in hand with ‘slum clearance and rebuilding programs that are intended in part to repopulate and commodify specific inner-city localities’ (Giulianotti and Klauser, 2010: 54).

This raises questions of *why* ‘securitized gentrification’ follows the Olympics from city to city. For Boykoff (2014), the Olympics represent archetypical exemplars of what he theorizes as *celebration capitalism*. In brief, celebration capitalism captures how mega-events arrive in cities and boost a ‘state of celebratory exception’ which suspends ‘normal life’. In modern societies, in Olympic host cities, this assists the commodification of festivity and fosters strong public-private partnerships that advance free-market interests (see also Giulianotti et al., 2015b). Simultaneously, this is backed up by the militarization and securitization of Olympic and non-Olympic spaces which, as justified in the name of public safety, concurrently serve to sanitize the ‘celebratory socio-political space’ (Boykoff, 2020: 53) where social groups including political activists, social critics, street vendors and homeless populations are rendered unwelcome (see Pauschinger, 2024; Kennelly, 2016).

Because the pursuit of celebratory and profitable spaces depends on the reorganization of everyday areas within host cities, there is a longstanding social history of evictions – often forced – in relation to the Olympics. Indeed, episodes of forced evictions and human and familial displacements, often occurring as a part of the wider gentrification or securitization processes which habitually accompany the hosting of an Olympic edition, have long dominated the literature on the intersection of the Olympics, human rights, and urban processes (Blunden, 2012; Pauschinger, 2024; Talbot, 2021, 2024). This literature, Keys (2019a: 11) illustrates, has developed in line with the processes whereby human rights – as the world’s ‘moral lingua franca’ – have become more embedded in mega-event practices ever since the Cold War. Increasingly, advocacy organizations, activist groups and NGOs have drawn attention to mega-event related human rights and social issues, including forced evictions (McGillivray et al., 2022).

From a legal standpoint, forced evictions have been defined by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), one of the UN’s principal treaty-monitoring bodies, as ‘the permanent or temporary removal against their will of individuals, families and/or communities from the homes and/or land which they occupy, without the provision of, and access to, appropriate forms of legal or other protection’ (UN, 1987: para 3). Importantly, the CESCR have also stated that, within the context of forced evictions, the procedural

protections comprising genuine consultation with those affected, the provision of reasonable notice regarding the date of such evictions, the identification of those carrying out the evictions, the prohibition of such practices in adverse weather conditions, the provision of legal remedies, and where possible the provision of legal aid to enable those affected to seek redress (ibid.: para 17), assume increased import. In the context of Olympic-induced evictions and displacement, the extent to which these safeguards are complied with becomes a critical source of concern. As ‘rights-holding social actors’ (Larkins et al, 2015; 333), the extent to which such protections have been extended to children and young people surfaces as one important consideration point.

An historical overview reveals that, in the case of Seoul’s 1988 Olympics, Davis (2010) noted how a ‘top-down’ style of redevelopment led to large-scale clearances, evictions and demolitions both prior to the Olympics and long after. While the Seoul Olympics were commonly praised as a ‘positive experience’, domestically and globally, the ‘main negative aspects of the Seoul Olympics were that they gained international notoriety for both forced eviction of working-class households and the treatment of street vendors, beggars and homeless people’ (p. 583). For Barcelona’s 1992 Olympics, it has been estimated that 624 families were displaced or relocated in relation to the completion of Olympics-related projects (COHRE, 2007: 112).

Reports also emerged over the large-scale evictions occurring in the lead-up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics, whereby ‘homes were razed in neighborhoods redeveloped into new commercial zones’ (Giulianotti and Klauser, 2010: 55). According to the *Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions* (COHRE), over a million people here were displaced from their homes (quoted in Boykoff, 2024). Specifically, Broudehous (2009) notes how 1.5 million citizens had their homes demolished between 2001-2008 in order to ‘make way for Olympic facilities and infrastructure projects, often without adequate compensation’. Similar issues emerged in relation to the 2012 Olympics in London, where 1,000 residents were dislodged from their homes (Boykoff, 2024). Meanwhile, the Rio De Janeiro Olympics in 2016, reportedly, led to 77,000 evictions; ‘many of them in favelas, the informal, high-density settlements with insecure property rights that span the city’ (Boykoff, 2024: 4). Finally, Suzuki et al. (2018) draws attention to the forced evictions of elderly and homeless people that occurred prior to the Tokyo 2020 (staged in 2021) Olympics in relation to the construction of the National Stadium. As they found, ‘[m]ost of the affected people felt that the process was too hasty and

lacked due respect for them. Those who resisted moving had to withstand coercive approaches by the government authorities’ (p. 94).

More recently, evidence from a range of combined civil society organisations points to a disturbing connection between the practice of forced evictions and displacements, and the hosting of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games (Le Revers De La Medaille, 2024). This has included the forcible eviction of 12,545 people, including 3,434 children and young people from the *Île-de-France* area, close to the Olympic athlete village, during the period of 2023/24. Immediately preceding the Olympics, and regularly occurring against the backdrop of inadequate legal and procedural probity, such evictions represented a three-fold increase in the number of comparable evictions from the year 2021/22 (ibid). Additionally, approximately 828 unaccompanied minors, who represent one of the most vulnerable societal groups, were ‘evicted from their living quarters, without being offered a shelter solution’ (p. 53). Consequently, as underscored by the evidence, in the lead up to the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, ‘outright eviction operations have become more recurrent and all the more violent since the young people set up camp on the banks of the Seine’ (p. 54).

Therefore, the almost normalised, if not expected practice, of systematic displacements and forced evictions appears to be an inseparable corollary of the hosting of an Olympic edition. Indeed, Smith (2012) writes that residential displacements constitute the ‘dark side’ of mega-events. However, this section argues that what has been given remarkably little attention within the literature on mega-event-related evictions or displacements – even despite the recent uptake in studies on the Olympics/human rights nexus (Boykoff, 2019; Author B and A, 2024) – is the impacts of such practices on children and young people. Indeed, whereas some have pointed out to the removal of young people from *public* spaces in Olympic build-ups (Kennelly, 2016), it remains hard to determine how many of the evicted residents – in the mentioned cases – are children and young people. Dowse et al. (2018) also reiterate this point, emphasizing the need for further work on sport mega-events, housing, and children’s rights and interests. As they write: ‘it is inevitable that children will be among those displaced [but] it is impossible to determine what proportion of the figures they make up because they are not separately identified’ (p. 102). For this reason, they argue, it remains ‘extremely difficult’ to measure the impact on children and to understand how their experiences differ from those of adults despite the established fact that children have a ‘heightened sensitivity to the consequences of poor environments’ (ibid.).



Against this background, the aim of this article is bridge the research gap speaking to the relationship between Olympics-induced evictions, displacements and children's rights. Specifically, we examine which children rights issue that can arise from displacements occurring in the context of the Olympics, their cities, and their socio-spatial reorganizations.

### **The impact of evictions and displacement on children's rights**

Limited scholarly literature exists on the impacts of mega-event induced evictions and displacements on children and young people. Indeed, Keys' (2019b: 127) contention that the increased prominence which human rights occupies, and exerts, within a sport mega-event context, such that they have 'have helped shape normative expectations of the global order', provokes a deeper interrogation of the extent to which children's rights has contributed to such endeavours. Hence, the extent to which children's rights – as identifiable legal benchmarks – have either influenced, or underpinned decision pertaining to the staging of an Olympic edition remains a site of much needed interrogation. Using Tokyo 2020 as an example, Aina et al., (2021: 6) found 'little evidence that [...] organizers had developed or implemented robust policies, principles or practises to respect, protect and promote child rights in Games planning'. Within the context of Olympic-induced evictions and displacements, the wider effect of children's rights, and the manner in which they are factored into such decision-making processes, becomes a critical area of concern.

Whilst it could be natural to position the relationship between evictions, displacements and young people exclusively within an exclusively housing rights framework, the following sections demonstrate that eviction and displacement practices associated with the Olympics (and indeed some other mega-events) affect children and young people across multiple areas of their lives. Moreover, while the twin processes, comprising of 'the velvet glove of gentrification and the iron fist of displacement' (Boykoff, 2016: 15), clearly violate the right to housing, it is contended that their violative impact affect children and their rights, across multiple areas, especially those residing in areas of urban deprivation. The following sections outlines how Olympic related evictions and displacements not only contravene the (i) child's *right to housing*, but also how they impact (ii) their *right to education*. Finally, (iii) we explore emerging implications *vis-à-vis* the child's *best interests principle*.

Whilst these are not the exclusive children's rights affected by Olympics-related evictions or displacements, we contend that they represent key entitlements which are flagrantly violated within such contexts. Moreover, the denial of these rights possesses the capacity to irreparably

impair the future life-chances of children and young people who may find themselves, for no other reason other than geographical proximity, caught within the developmental reach of an Olympics edition.

### ***The right to housing***

Pattillo (2013) draws attention to the need for sociologists of housing to critically explore the right to housing and its impacts; specifically, its enforcement and distribution. Indeed, Desmond (2012: 90) writes that evictions are ‘perhaps the most understudied process affecting the lives of the urban poor’. Undoubtedly, the first area directly impacted by sport mega-event related displacements is the right to housing. From its genesis in Article 25(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, the right to housing is widely protected within international human rights law, and finds expression in Article 11(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), Article 14.2 (h) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), and Article 5 (e) (iii) of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965), amongst others.

From a children’s rights perspective, the right to housing is enshrined within two distinct provisions – thereby signalling the significance which housing plays in the lives of children and young people. First, Article 16(1) CRC states that: ‘No child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her ... home’. Second, Article 27(3) CRC asserts that:

States Parties, in accordance with national conditions and within their means, shall take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shall in the case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.

However, from a children’s standpoint, such displacements or evictions do not reside within solitary legal or practical parameters. Rather, the violation of the child’s right to housing has clear knock-on consequences on the child’s broader suite of rights and is much more pervasive and enduring in its effect. In reality, the outworking’s of displacement and forced evictions, which are inextricably bound up the boarder preparations associated with the hosting of sport mega-event, impact children and young people across multiple areas of their lives.

It has been highlighted that ‘forced evictions have particularly serious implications for children’ (Langford and du Plessis, 2005: 6), while the Swiss based non-governmental organisation COHRE (2007: 33) has confirmed that the ‘the impact of forced evictions on children can be similar to war in terms of the developmental consequences’. Moreover, in their reiteration of the consequences of child homelessness, Björkhagen Turesson and Staaf (2023: 282) remind

us that it exacerbates mental ill-health, affects the child's development and adaptive abilities, whilst having a 'negative effect on children's school situation since it in most cases involves several moves between schools and the lack of a place to study'. Further, Stewart and Rhoden (2006: 338) observe that such is the impact of poor housing and homelessness on the physical and mental health of children and young people, that the needs of children 'must be given a far higher priority' within wider housing policies.

Therefore, the near-unanimous acceptance of the negative, and subjectively adverse consequences which forced evictions, and homelessness, have on children and young people's wider rights and well-being necessitates a deeper interrogation of not just the overlap of mega-events and human displacement generally, but demands a more nuanced and inter-disciplinary examination of the *ipso facto* vulnerability of children and young people to such deep-seated violations of their human rights. This also entails an examination of wider intersectional factors such as race, ethnicity and poverty, amongst others, as variables which either heighten the susceptibility of certain children and young people to the abovementioned violative conduct, or as factors which exacerbate the intensity or scale of their human rights breaches.

For example, in the lead-up to the Rio de Janeiro 2016 Olympic Games, Crout (2018) recounts how around 22,059 families residing in the area were systematically displaced between 2009-2015. Although the FIFA World Cup 2014 occurred during this period too, further evidence from the Norwegian Refugee Council (2016) confirms that 'around 6,600 families were evicted or under threat of eviction in 2015 to make way for the 2016 Olympic Games'. However, drilling down deeper into these figures, which invariably include children and young people, a perverse paradox arises. Many of those who were affected by the forced evictions associated with the Olympics were already living in the *favelas* or informal settlements which, as Talbot (2024) reminds us, emerged as a response to unmet housing needs, and therefore were already living in a context of state neglect.

Therefore, whilst acknowledging the diverse nature of these *favelas*, their evictions from the *favelas* which, as previously documented by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing (2004, para 49) largely comprise of 'cardboard or tin shacks (barracos)', arguably constitutes a double and successive breach of their human rights to housing, thereby underscoring the uniquely vulnerable position these people occupy within society. As Rolnik (2013) writes, this also reaffirmed existing patterns speaking to exclusionary urban development in Brazil. From a children's rights perspective, the UN Committee on the Rights

of the Child in their examination of Brazil's compliance with the rights enshrined in the CRC, in the year prior to the hosting of the Olympics, further noted evidence of: 'torture and enforced disappearances of children during military and other operations by security forces, particularly in favelas' (CRC Committee, 2015: para 35(a)). Such observations are not only indicative of the distinct vulnerability which those who live in and around proposed Olympic spaces occupy, but underscore the wider human rights violations regularly accompanying the habitual developmental practice of forced evictions and human displacement.

Clair (2019) also highlights that child homelessness, which can range from temporary accommodation, to rooflessness, is especially detrimental for children and young people. From a health and wellbeing perspective, she observes that the risks of homelessness include 'increased risk of chronic health conditions, undernutrition, development delays and problems with cognitive function, as well as reduced likelihood of receiving vaccinations' (ibid.: 620). More widely, UN-HABITAT, the designated international organisation operating around housing rights, have recognised that forced evictions 'often result in children's schooling being interrupted or completely stopped' (2009: 9), whilst Schwarts et al. (2022: 9) conclude that 'eviction may be a driver of educational inequity, most obviously by class but also by race'.

In underscoring the wider rights-infringing impact of such practices on children's education rights, which are protected by both Articles 28 and 29 of the CRC, in addition to other provisions within international human rights law, the practice of forced evictions and displacements which are intimately interwoven with the broader infrastructural and preparatory developments which accompany the hosting of an Olympic edition, highlight the unmistakable reality that evictions and displacements are not just confined to the right to housing alone.

### ***Knock-on effects on the right to education***

It is clear therefore that the violation of the child's right to housing has an unambiguous knock-on effect on other rights. This also includes their right to rest, leisure, play and recreational activities, and participation in cultural life and the arts (Article 31 CRC), which is directly affected by homelessness, and insecure or inadequate housing provision (Corr et al., 2023). However, on account of space, this section examines the knock-on effect which the violation of the right to housing has on the child's right to education.

From a children's rights perspective, the right to education finds expression within both Articles 28 and 29 of the CRC. Its importance as a *human right* is also underscored by its inclusion in

most international and regional human rights treaties (Sheppard, 2022). As a ‘multi-faceted right’ (UNESCO, 2000: 16), it has been described as an ‘instrument of socialization’ (Verhellen, 1993), and a ‘crucial human right for children’ (Quennerstedt, 2009: 162). In this regard, it has been continuously referred to and conceptualised as a multiplier right (Tomaševsk, 2001); one which enhances and underpins the activation and delivery of others.

Aside also from the direct personal benefits it brings, education also assumes an important role in breaking down hardened barriers, often socially and historically constructed, to advance a more equal and fair society. In recognition of its transformative capacity, the CESCR have stated that it is both a ‘human right in itself and an indispensable means of realizing other rights’ (UN, 1999, para 1). Such sentiments were reiterated by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, stating that education:

[G]oes far beyond formal schooling to embrace the broad range of life experiences and learning processes which enable children, individually and collectively, to develop their personalities, talents and abilities and to live a full and satisfying life within society (The UN, 2001: para 4).

However, one of the clear consequences which flow from the practice of forced evictions which regularly accompany Olympic editions (Talbot, 2024), is its unequivocal impact on the child’s right to education. Although ‘the link between a child’s right to adequate housing and his or her right to education may not be readily apparent’ (COHRE, 2006: 69), the long-term negative educational consequences of a forced eviction are particularly acute for children and young people. Brackenridge et al. (2015: 247) highlight that the impact of mega-events on children and young people has hitherto amounted to a ‘blind spot’ within the operational consideration of host countries and their associated organising committees. However, what remains absent from existing scholarship is a sustained engagement with the intersection of forced evictions and the child’s right to education.

Whilst noting the ‘scarce’ nature of this overlap, Kahlmeter (2021: 216), nonetheless concludes that for adolescents facing residential dislocation, including from evictions, that ‘all types of moves are negatively associated with educational attainment, but that the impact will be *greater if the relocation is forced by authorities*’ (ibid.: 225, emphasis added). Although not predicated within an Olympic context, these findings still possess considerable transferrable significance as they foreground the negative outcomes which evictions exert on children and young people’s education. Such summations corroborate extant findings by Desmond et al. (2013), who concluded that children who experience eviction, or endure higher rates of residential instability, are more likely to experience lower levels of educational attainment, higher rates of

truancy, and more likely to fall outside the formal education system. The existence of such evidence remains particularly important in any discussion of Olympic-induced evictions and displacements. This is because such practices not only exert a deleterious impact on children and young people's housing rights, but disproportionately – and simultaneously – affect low-income families within areas of existent social and urban derivation, where the right to education shoulders significantly more importance.

For instance, COHRE (2007) observed that for the 624 families that were displaced and relocated as a result of the urban renewal which accompanied the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Summer Games – 65 percent of whom were of Roma ethnic origin – most alternative housing was not within the same geographical area. This consequently led to 'secondary social effects on other aspects of life, such as [...] education' (p. 112). Additionally, in the lead-up to the Rio's 2016 Olympics, it was reported that one of the consequences which flowed from the forced removal which precipitated the Olympic Games was that children 'lost several basic rights, such as schools (right to education)' and 'adequate transportation for schools' (World Cup and Olympics Popular Committee of Rio de Janeiro, 2015: 133) – often as a consequence of being relocated to areas at great distance from their original residence. This was also supported by evidence adduced by the non-governmental organisation *Terre des Hommes* (2016) who, in their assessment of the impact of the Rio Games on children and young people highlighted the harmful educational impact which accompanied the practice of forced evictions. This included situations where 'children could not find school places in their new locations and were forced to repeat a year', to children facing 'long or dangerous journeys to school' (p.6). Such evidence powerfully underscores our contention that forced evictions and human displacement must be viewed within a broader children's rights context as not just violations of the child's right to housing, but as a gateway violation to other children's rights, leading to potentially negative and enduring lifelong consequences.

For example, absence from school and the wider fragmentation of children's educational rights has been considered a direct contributory factor in the sexual exploitation of children and young people which occurred during Rio 2016 (ibid.: 134). Further, writing in the context of the World Cup, staged two years prior to the Olympic Games, Graeff et al. (2021) note that it had a negative educational impact within one geographical area – already socially deprived – which was affected by the World Cup. From children and young people missing 'a term or even a year on their education trajectory' (ibid.: 458), to 'to learners' school disengagement and even abandonment of their formal instruction' (ibid.). Thus, this section demonstrates the clear

connection between mega-event related displacements and evictions, and the child's right to education, with the justificatory long-term developmental promise of the former often negating the latter.

### ***The best interests of the child principle***

Twyford and Grant (2023) contend that the best interest principle needs to be integrated into mega-events' bidding and legacy documents. Building upon this, we contend that the third area in which the practice of forced evictions and displacements affect children and young people is in the manner in which they impact and undermine the child's best interests principle pursuant to Article 3 CRC. This holds that:

In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration (Article 3(1) CRC)

Described by Stalford (2017: 37) as the 'normative axis around which decisions relating to children revolve', Article 3 CRC ensures the centralization of the child's welfare, and best interests, in all matters which affect them. As Ruggiero (2022: 25) argues, and in echoing the sentiments expressed by the CRC Committee, the process of determining what is in the child's best interests 'demands a continuous process of child rights impact assessment to foresee the impact that any proposed law, policy, or budgetary allocation may have on children, and child rights impact evaluation, to evaluate the actual impact of implementation'. This therefore highlights the fact that Article 3 must be subsumed within all governmental decision-making processes at all levels, which by extension includes at all stages of Olympic related plans.

As one of the CRC's guiding principles, it must inform and frame the delivery of all other rights within the CRC, including the child's right to housing. In other words, all other children's rights must be interpreted, and given effect to, in a manner which upholds their best interests (Peleg, 2019). The CRC Committee has stated that the principle is a 'dynamic concept that requires an assessment appropriate to the specific context', (CRC Committee, 201a3: para 1), and further that it assumes crucial significance 'when States are engaged in weighing competing priorities, such as short-term economic considerations and longer-term development decisions' (CRC Committee, 2013b: Para 17). Therefore, in the context of Olympic – and wider mega-event contexts – which involve large-scale infrastructural developments, which, as outlined above, often exert irreparable impacts on children's housing, education, and wider human rights, the need for the child's best interests to be foregrounded within all domestic mega-event decisions becomes a critical operational priority. Moreover, the CRC Committee have adopted a useful

threefold conceptual framework underpinning the application of the best-interests principle in practice (CRC Committee, 2013). First, the Committee has stated that the principle encompasses a substantive right which enshrines the individual right of the child to have their best interests taken as a primary consideration. Second, the right also amounts to an interpretative legal principle such that legal provisions must be construed in a manner which best gives effect to the child's best interests. Lastly, the Committee has stated that the principle encompasses a procedural rule, so that any decision likely to impact upon the child must include an evaluation as to the probable impact such a decision will have on the child's best interests.

In the context of forced evictions, the need to consider Article 3 becomes apparent. This is because, to date, respect for the best interests principle, and children's rights more widely, have largely elided scrutiny within Olympics-related practices and discourses (Twyford and Grant, 2023). For example, in the UN's Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-Based Evictions and Displacement (2007), no reference is made to the best interests principle, despite the guidelines noting that evictions and displacements disproportionately affect the most vulnerable and marginalised sectors of society, including children. Equally silent on the child's best interests principle was the Report of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing two years later, which specifically examined the impact of mega-events, including the Olympics on the right to housing (UN, 2009). Despite advancing important suggestions to both national governments, and sport mega-event franchise owners, such recommendations failed to refer to children and young people, the CRC, or their rights, in any meaningful or systematic way. As argued here, the effect of such an omission is that children's rights become operationally sidelined within the context of the evictions and displacements which often accompany the hosting of an Olympic edition. This is significant as the impact of such practices on children's housing and education rights, as outlined already, are such that it is difficult to conceive of any situation in which they would be in the child's best interests. This therefore augments the necessity on all governments to ensure the centralisation of the principle within their mega-event developmental policies and practices. As Zetterman (2010: 497) argues, 'the scope of the principle is wide and incorporates all State-initiated and private actions concerning children as a group'.

Given that such evictions are largely contextualised, if not eulogised, on account of the perceived public benefits (Mair et al., 2023), or the positive and enduring transformative



legacies that they supposedly leave in their wake, UN–Habitat nonetheless remind us that (2014: 2) the processes surrounding such practices often ‘do not provide protection for the most vulnerable, procedural guarantees or due process’. This affirms the accepted position that it is those ‘who do not have the clout to change the decisions and designs of the project leading to their displacement’ (UN, 2014: 7), that are typically affected. Such an observation highlights that, from a children’s rights perspective, the need to centralize the best interests principle, as a necessary procedural consideration, and safeguard, within mega-event development-related practices becomes an *immediate* operational priority.

### **Concluding remarks – moving forward**

Recent years have witnessed a considerable interest – on the public, political, civil society and academic levels – in the negative social impacts and costs of sport mega-events (Lauermaun, 2022; Giulianotti et al., 2015a). Importantly, stories about evictions and displacements, following mutually reinforcing processes of securitization and gentrification, have become commonplace before, during and after contemporary sport mega-events. Most recently – at the time of writing – ahead of the Paris 2024 Olympics, where civil society groups have suggested the Olympics would, again, ‘accelerate the exclusion of the most vulnerable’ (*The Independent*, 2024). Boykoff (2024) has recently urged scholars to continue to critically examine the social, spatial and political consequences of the Olympics. Kennelly and Watt (2012: 151), meanwhile, highlight the need for capturing perspectives of the Olympic processes through the ‘eyes of local populations’ rather than through the eyes of global media and Olympic spectators.

By following these scholars’ lead, this article argues that the impacts of the processes of securitization, gentrification, and displacements in association with mega-events need to be understood within a children’s rights framework. As this article contends, given the significant impact and infringing nature that sport mega-events like the Olympics can have upon children and young people, it remains crucial to engage more systematically with these realities. This, we show and argue, demands the utilization of inter-disciplinary insights that bridge together the sociologies of sport, childhood and the study of human rights in order to more holistically and empirically understand how mega-event induced displacements are at odds with children’s rights (cf. Kennelly and Watt, 2012). As demonstrated here, evictions and displacements occurring in association with mega-events impact upon the right to housing, education and the best interest principle. Sociologically, this assumes increased significance, as this paper has highlighted that such violations do not occur within narrow or seamless legal parameters.

Rather, the enduring nature of such violations across the life span of children and young person concerned necessitates a deeper interrogation of such issues along important intersectional and longitudinal strands to fully apprehend the nature, scale, and impact of the effect of mega-events on children and young people.

However, this also raises important questions concerning the role of the wider United Nations human rights monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. Considering the consistent pattern of human rights breaches, especially in housing, which now – unremarkably – follow the hosting of many mega-events, the ability – or inability – of human rights law to push back against such practices becomes apparent. One clear legal limitation resides in the fact that mega-event franchise owners are largely private operators and therefore appear to fall outside the classical legal axis connecting the state and individual, which underpins human rights law (Author A and B, 2022). That is not to say that their actions are immune from human rights law. With the widespread acceptance of the corporate obligation to respect human rights (UN, 2011), and the increased appreciation of the impact of the private sector on human rights generally (Deva and Bilchitz, 2013), and children’s rights specifically (CRC Committee, 2013), much scope now exists to position these responsibilities against the escalating evidence base which underscores the rings-infringing consequences of mega-events, including the Olympics, to drive forward positive change.

In light of this, this article makes three key contributions to existing literature. First, it adds to the body of literature on sport mega-events and their social consequences (Boykoff, 2019, 2021, 2024, Horne, 2007). It does so by situating insights from children’s rights law within the debates on mega-event related processes like securitization, gentrification and displacement. Second, this article makes a contribution to our sociological understandings of urban exclusions, reorganizations and politics via the exemplar of sport mega-events. In closing, we agree with Dowse et al. (2018), who argue for a more responsible human rights and child-oriented approach to mega-events’ delivery and legacies. Thirdly, concerning the wider literature on human rights and sport mega-events, which this article is situated in, we note that this remains compatible with the conceptual model for progressive human rights outcomes at sport mega-events developed by McGillivray et al., (2019) which holds that researchers should take a holistic life-cycle approach to the implementation of human rights at mega-events, and advocates, specifically, for good governance, stakeholders’ democratic participation, formalization of human rights and the use of sensitive urban development (p. 176). Drawing inspiration from Dowse et al. (2018) and McGillivray et al. (2018), we propose that researchers

should continue to empirically explore the impacts of securitization and gentrification processes upon children and young people, by examining ‘older’ and ‘new’ cases including the mentioned Paris 2024 Olympics, but also forthcoming Olympics in Los Angeles (2028), which ‘has already contributed to the displacement of working-class residents and the restructuring of material space in ways that benefit the affluent’ (Boykoff, 2024: 4), and Brisbane (2032). The case of Los Angeles 2028 is also particularly peculiar given that the US is not a signatory of the CRC, thus raising questions about which mechanisms will protect and uphold children’s rights.

Moreover, in a time where one may identify a more pronounced, institutional embrace of human rights discourses from sport’s governing bodies (Author B and A, 2024), it concurrently remains imperative to investigate *how* and *when* the rights of children and young people are integrated into both institutional requirements and charters, and specific host cities’ mega-event bids and human rights commitments. Overall, it is hoped that this paper’s sociological but human rights underpinned analysis can function as an important starting point for such research moving forward.

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