**Abstract**

**Esports in the Urban Imaginary: London’s Place in the Political Economy of the *League***

***of Legends* World Finals**

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On November 19*th* 2023, Riot Games announced that the 2024 *League of Legends* (*LoL*) World Finals would be played in London’s O2 Arena. It is the first time that the finals will be hosted in the UK, prompting London mayor Sadiq Khan to refer to the city as a ‘leading destination for esports’ and the event as a chance to globally showcase the UK ‘capital’s cutting-edge gaming industry’ (Stubbs, 2023). This paper will provide a critical analysis of the discourses surrounding the event, arguing that esports tournaments on this scale provide megacities, such as London, an opportunity to reimagine themselves as existing at the centre of a global digital economy. In other words, world esports tournaments of this scale can be understood as symbolic events that negate political economic contradictions existing between cities, creative economies, and digital platforms.

The idea of a globally spanning sporting or cultural event taking on an industrial significance beyond its spectacle has a long history in urban policy in general and London in particular. In 1851 London played host to the ‘Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations’: an early example of what came to be known as The World’s Fair. According to Tom Gunning (1994: 423), this form of Universal Exposition ‘explicitly recalled the image of an imperial city, as neo-classical architectural motifs expressed its universal ambitions in terms of world domination’. Recent research on the international significance of esports industries and events has noted related phenomena, such as in Yu’s (2018) analysis of esports in China that is seen as a way to promote the region as an ‘epicenter’ of the global digital economy.

This paper will use critical discourse analysis to identify political economic contradictions present in press releases, media coverage, and promotional material leading up to the *LoL* World Finals, focusing specifically on tensions between municipal creative industries discourses (Durieux, 2023) and the transnational realities of esports ownership (Ahn et al, 2020). Contributing to current research on global and regional esports events (McCauley et al, 2020: Witkowski and Harkin, 2024), specifically by framing large-scale esports tournaments as symbolic events that negate political economic contradictions existing between transnational industries and regional gaming clusters.

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