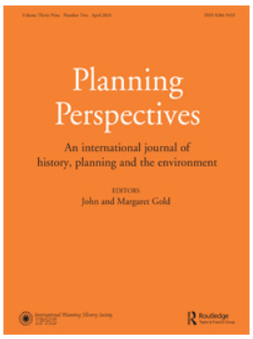

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# Olympic urbanism: past, present and future

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EDITORIAL



# Olympic urbanism: past, present and future

## Introduction

City planning and urban change have become closely associated with the Olympic Games. Early editions of the revived Games had relatively limited effects on their host cities but, over the past century, hosting the Olympic Games has become an urban project rather than merely a sporting or geopolitical one.[1] This is demonstrated by the ways in which key terms such as 'legacy' and 'spectacle' are now commonly used. Rather than memories, behaviours or cultures nurtured by the Games, Olympic legacies now tend to be associated with physical changes made to host cities. Similarly, contemporary Olympic spectacle tends to be produced by dramatic architecture rather than unbridled festivity or sporting drama. Preparation for the Games is now less about spectator anticipation, athlete training and event organization, but rather a 'build-up' characterized by frenzied construction, planning disputes, cost overruns and the ill-treatment of labourers.

Put simply, the Olympic Games have been urbanized. Host cities, and the changes made to those cities, are not merely background settings for the Olympic Games. Instead, the urban environment has moved to centre stage in that rather than merely staging the Games, organizers seem intent on *staging the city* – an idea explored by various authors including Hu (this volume). More recent shifts have also contributed to making the Olympic Games an essentially urban event. The Summer Games have always been associated with major cities, but the Winter Games have now also been urbanized, with large cities like Beijing, Salt Lake City, Turin and Vancouver hosting the Games since the Millennium. Moreover, new events have been introduced to represent urban sports in both the Winter and Summer Games. The programme for Paris 2024, for instance, includes breaking, BMX freestyle, skateboarding, and 3X3 basketball. These sports tend to be staged in streets, parks and plazas not formal arenas, thereby furthering the Games' penetration into the city and the city into the Games.

The urbanization of the Olympic Games and the continuing evolution of the IOC-host city relationship[2] invites deeper consideration of Olympic urbanism and its role in shaping multiple cities across the world. This special issue of *Planning Perspectives* takes up this challenge, placing particular emphasis on planning histories and historiographies. The timing of its publication in 2024 is significant. Besides being the year that celebrates the Games of the XXXIII Olympiad, 2024 marks the centenary of the previous Paris Summer Olympics and of the first ever Winter Olympic Games at Chamonix in France's Haute-Savoie.

This editorial identifies the different dimensions of Olympic urbanism, providing an overview that contextualizes the papers included in this issue of the journal. Rather than trying to isolate specific chronological phases as other authors have done,[3] we explore five dimensions that are relevant to almost every Games staged since 1924, and which will remain relevant for the foreseeable

[1] Schut, Beaudouin, and Philippe. "Interaction Between Olympism and Host Cities," 1460.
[2] Gold and Gold, *The Making of Olympic Cities*; Gold and Gold, *Olympic Cities*.
[3] Essex and Chalkley, "Mega-Sporting Events in Urban and Regional Policy"; Pitts and Liao, *Sustainable Olympic Design and Urban Development*.

future. The Games have not only helped to modernize or reshape existing cities: they have been drivers of urban expansion – turning peripheral or greenfield sites into built-up areas. Other dimensions range from physically manifest examples of Olympic urbanism, such as new sports precincts or upgraded infrastructures, to more subtle instances where the Games have triggered experimental designs and new planning cultures. Following this overarching discussion, the paper explores some of the complexities and controversies associated with Olympic urbanism. After a brief section that reveals how future directions might build on established trends, we introduce the papers that follow.

## What is Olympic urbanism?

Olympic urbanism extends well beyond the large-scale development of facilities and infrastructure linked to Olympic plans and projects. The ambitions of Olympic hosts to communicate their world class status and penetrate global networks means that authors like Ren see Olympic urbanism more broadly in 'aspirational' terms.[4] As Lauermann[5] emphasizes, Olympic planning coalitions conceive grand visions of the future driven by urban political strategies which are never fully realized. An 'ideal, imaginary and grand urbanism'[6] tends to be envisaged, one that overrides the politics and inconvenient realities of actual places. Olympic urbanism also includes planning and development instigated by 'failed' Olympic bids or those events that were cancelled or postponed. Istanbul and Toronto, for instance, have never hosted the Olympic Games but planning in these cities has been shaped by their long-held ambitions to be Olympic hosts.[7] Helsinki, Rome and Tokyo have all staged the Games, but Olympic urbanism in each case can only be fully understood by considering the influence of earlier Olympic festivals that were cancelled. For instance, by amalgamating the experience of cancelled Games, unsuccessful bids and fully realized projects, Languillon-Aussel (this volume) estimates that Tokyo has been involved in Olympic planning for 50 years over the past century. Here and elsewhere, Olympic urbanism is not an obscure footnote in the city's planning history, it has influenced urban plans and reshaped built environments.

## Five dimensions of Olympic urbanism

To provide a contextual and conceptual basis for this special issue of *Planning Perspectives*, it is useful to recognize and explore five key dimensions of Olympic urbanism. Like the five Olympic Rings, these are distinct but interlocking.

### *Urbanization*

The first key dimension is the way that the Games have been used to urbanize rural areas or expand settlements into less developed fringes of urban areas. This is something particularly associated with the Winter Games. In France and Japan, for example, the Winter Games have repeatedly been deployed as instruments of regional policy to assist the development of peripheral areas.[8] Yet the Summer Games have also been used by municipal authorities as a platform for encouraging

[4]Ren, "Aspirational Urbanism from Beijing to Rio de Janeiro".
[5]Lauermann, "Visualising Sustainability at the Olympics".
[6]Kassens-Noor, "From Ephemeral Planning to Permanent Urbanism," 41.
[7]Oliver, "Toronto's Olympic Aspirations"; Bilsel and Zelef, "Mega Events in Istanbul".
[8]Goldblatt, "The Games".

growth. Until the 1950s, the Melbourne suburb of Heidelberg was predominantly rural and sparsely settled. This changed when the Housing Commission of Victoria built multiple residences, including the athletes' village for the 1956 Games. Olympic-driven urban growth also involves knitting together existing urban areas, creating greater metropolitan clusters or mega-cities. Notably, this is how Tokyo 1964 was planned, expanding the Japanese capital into a metropolis by linking together suburban regions and integrating sites previously occupied by the US military. Plans for Brisbane 2032 hint at a similar strategic objective – forging better connections between Brisbane, the Gold Coast, and the Sunshine Coast to create a Southeast Queensland metropolis.[9]

### *Planned precincts*

As well as promoting urban growth generally, Olympic urbanism has tended to encompass the construction of specialized facilities in dedicated precincts. The designs for these sites are linked to the Olympic movement's preference for a concentrated Olympic Park or compound – arguably linked to Coubertin's wish to recreate ancient Olympia – in which a 'circular, utopian configuration' provides convenience for athletes, officials, media and spectators.[10] The resulting cluster of facilities, with venues, accommodation and support facilities surrounded by parkland, is sometimes called the Olympic Ring – an apt name which also emphasizes the underpinning security rationale. Notable examples included those developed for Atlanta 1996 and Sochi 2014. Atlanta's Ring differed from conventional Olympic Parks in that it covered a large part of the city centre – a designated 'magic circle' encompassing all of downtown, part of mid-town and several disadvantaged neighbourhoods.[11] Within this ring a more concentrated Olympic zone was constructed, focused on the Centennial Olympic Park, with considerable displacement of existing residents and itinerant occupants.[12] Sochi's Ring – Adler Park – was unusual in that it was constructed from scratch at enormous expense for a Winter Games. Key facilities – including an outdoor stadium and multiple new skating arenas – were placed on the perimeter of a round medal plaza, forming a circular park.[13]

Constructing large Olympic precincts is associated with urban zoning and modernist planning, where a particular section of city was designated as a leisure zone. For example, Berger and Vesikansa (this volume) emphasize that the Olympic facilities for Helsinki 1952 were planned as a sports, leisure and recreation zone in the northern part of Finland's capital. In host cities that are already highly developed, these precincts tend to be controversial as they tend to 'erase' rather than supplement the existing built environment. As Raco and DeVita (this volume) note, these projects are used by urban regimes keen to override the political complexities of places. Once built, Olympic precincts are notoriously difficult to integrate into the urban fabric, especially when they are in peripheral locations or cut off from the rest of the city by waterways, motorways, and other transport infrastructure. The Sochi Ring, which includes a cluster of six new arenas, housing and hotels, exemplifies the problems that these sites face attracting people post-Olympics.[14] The most famous examples are large-scale Olympic clusters built in London and Sydney, but arguably the most successful Olympic precincts are those constructed for Munich 1972 and Melbourne 1956. In both cases, the Olympic Park still performs a significant function as a site

[9]Brisbane 2032, "Elevate 2042".
[10]Kassens-Noor, "From Ephemeral Planning to Permanent Urbanism".
[11]Rutheiser, "Imagineering Atlanta".
[12]Larsen and Staley, "Atlanta Olympics".
[13]Essex, "The Winter Olympics".
[14]Ibid.

for everyday leisure consumption. Munich's Olympic Park, designed by the landscape architect Günther Grzimek, was purposefully integrated into the cityscape, and there was an admirable concentration on the site's 'post-Olympic function as a green space for Munich's citizens'.[15] Melbourne's Olympic Park precinct is now a world-famous sports zone: it is so successful that Australian officials overlooked the Victorian capital for the 2032 candidature because there were already too many regular competing events occurring there.[16]

### Structures and infrastructures

Olympic urbanism is not usually confined to specific districts: it often affects the wider city as hosts take the opportunity to make more fundamental changes to urban structures and infrastructures. The Olympic Games have the capacity to unlock state funding and to generate the political will and strategic partnerships required to make big things happen – even if the resulting changes are only tenuously linked to the Olympics. A time-limited 'window of opportunity' means that key infrastructure projects (e.g. transport, telecommunications, sewerage and housing) can be delivered even if they are not essential to the operation of the Games themselves. The speed of change in Olympic host cities is accelerated – this is why the Olympics is often regarded as a catalyst for urban development. This catalytic effect is underpinned by several forces: the power of immovable deadlines, the involvement of multiple levels of government, intense media scrutiny, and the knowledge amongst private sector stakeholders that Olympic projects are 'too big to fail'.

Various metaphors are often used to help explain this catalytic effect but given its sporting derivation, perhaps the most appropriate is to interpret the Olympics as a 'springboard' for the wider transformation of a city. The often-oversimplified case of Barcelona 1992 is perhaps the most renowned example, but many host cities from Rome 1960 onwards adopted a similarly ambitious approach. In Rome, a new system of roads, and a new airport were constructed in addition to Olympic facilities and accommodation. These efforts were surpassed by Tokyo 1964 where the Games were used as an opportunity to rebuild the city's sewerage system, construct 100 kilometres of superhighways, a monorail to supply connection with Haneda airport, and open two new subway lines. The new network of roads that connected the peripheral Olympic Villages reshaped Tokyo and established 'the contours of the new mega-city'.[17]

It is perhaps no coincidence that at the time of their Olympic transformations, Rome, Tokyo and Barcelona were trying to recover from the damaging effects of controversial political regimes. What better way to 'bounce back' than using the springboard of the Olympic Games? Telesca differentiates Rome's *renewal* from Barcelona's *regeneration* – which went beyond physical change to help address social and economic objectives.[18] In the contemporary era, a further shift is required: from Olympic driven urban regeneration to Olympic-inspired *regenerative urbanism.*[19] There is some evidence that this transition is already underway. Rather than merely 'showcasing sustainability' as Essex and De Oliviera (this volume) have suggested that many previous host cities have attempted to do, the organizers of Brisbane 2032 suggest that 'The Games creates the impetus for a regenerative culture'.[20] One way that this can happen is by prioritizing provision of green

[15]Schiller and Young, "Motion and Landscape," 284.
[16]Baka, "Melbourne's Status as an Olympic City".
[17]Goldblatt, "The Games".
[18]Telesca, "Dealing with the Past and Planning the Future".
[19]Smith, "Urban Regeneration".
[20]Brisbane 2032, "Elevate 2042," 41.

infrastructure and urban green spaces: plans for Milan-Cortina 2026 include a new park stretching from the city centre to the urban periphery (see Raco and Da Vita, this volume). Recent research suggests an average uplift of 3.4 per cent in urban green space coverage post-Olympics,[21] but in the context of biodiversity and climate crises more substantial green space legacies will be required. Olympic Parks still tend to comprise 'concrete utopias'[22] rather than green parks – there is a conspicuous absence of green space in some[23] and a noted tendency to downsize green space provision in others.[24]

## Experimental urbanism

Olympic urbanism not only comprises material changes to the built environment, but also plans, models and experiments that influence planning and urban design in the host city and beyond. Whilst the Olympics produce an inherently temporary city during the Games, the lessons learned and experiences generated can direct urban futures.[25] Indeed, Olympic sites are often designed to provide inspiration for wider projects. For example, London's Olympic Park was meant to provide a 'blueprint for sustainable living' and it has since been positioned as an experimental landscape where new ideas, technologies and designs can be tested. Some of the architectures, landscapes and plans implemented as part of Olympic projects have inspired city making practices in other cities. Examples include Frank Gehry's Fish sculpture, a pioneering example of digital design which was installed in Barcelona for the 1992 Olympic Games. According to Calder, Gehry's Fish was 'the first high profile project in which the computer design model the architects used to finalize its form was then also used to inform the fabricators and contractors what to make and how to assemble it'.[26] Of course, not all experimentation is positive or progressive, and there are many examples where the Olympic Games have been used to try out, refine or launch more controversial design interventions. For example, Coaffee (this volume) notes that the Olympic city is the 'ideal laboratory for the testing of an array of new technologies, techniques of social control or security procedures'.

## Planning cultures

The Olympic Games affects host cities not only by introducing new plans, but also new planning systems and related organizations. The Olympic Games are notorious for the complex alphabet soup of limited life organizations they spawn to support planning, delivery and legacies.[27] There is a tendency to assume that these systems and organizations, like the Games themselves, are temporary, but they are often retained post-event and have enduring effects. Examples include the adaptations made to planning systems to facilitate Olympic preparations. For instance, Zembri-Mary and Engrand-Liner identify that the centralized planning consent introduced to assist the construction of Olympic projects for Athens 2004 would prove pervasive.[28] In numerous other instances, too, organizations introduced to help design and deliver

[21]Tu et al., "Olympic Effects on Reshaping Urban Greenspace of Host Cities".
[22]Schiller and Young, "Motion and Landscape".
[23]Azzali, "The Legacies of Sochi".
[24]Smith, "From Green Park to Theme Park", Rutheiser, "Imagineering Atlanta".
[25]Gold and Gold, "Urban Segments and Event Spaces".
[26]Calder, "Architecture," 419.
[27]Smith, "'De-Risking' East London".
[28]Zembri-Mary and Engrand-Liner, "Urban Planning Law".

Olympic plans or Olympic bids have been retained by host cities and continue to shape cities long after the Games have finished. The innovative inter-municipal, city-region organization Communaute Urbaine Lyonnaise (later renamed Grand Lyon) conceived to help prepare Lyon's unsuccessful bid for the 1968 Olympic Games is a good example. Lyon's Olympic bid brought together 'traditionally uncooperative' local actors and linked them to national organizations 'to create a national local coalition for the advancement of Lyon's city-regional interests'.[29] This organization continues to guide regional development today.[30] In other instances, planning cultures and expertise nurtured during the build up to a Games or during the preparation of a bid have been retained even if specific organizations have not. One example is provided by Languillon-Aussel (this volume), namely, the way that perpetual Olympic planning in Tokyo over the past century has shaped planning cultures as well as physical structures in the Japanese capital.

## Complexities and confusion

Olympic urbanism is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that is hard to define, partly because it is constantly evolving but also because it is hard to separate from wider urban change. In places like Barcelona, Rio de Janeiro and Beijing, the Games provided an opportunity to ramp up long-held ambitions to boost, grow or restructure cities..[31] This makes it hard to unravel the specific contribution made by Olympic projects. For example, in Barcelona it is unclear whether the city's regeneration was triggered by the Olympics or whether the city's regeneration (guided by a comprehensive urban plan) enabled the city to stage the Olympic Games.[32] Even in cities such as Paris and London that have hosted the Olympic Games on several occasions, these events have intersected with other mega-events to deliver changes to urban morphologies. The effects of the 1908 and 1948 Olympic Games in London cannot be understood without reference to major exhibitions in 1908 and 1924/5 that took place in the same locations. Even for the 2012 Games, exhibitions held over 150 years previously (in 1851 and 1862) shaped legacy ambitions, with Albertopolis in South Kensington inspiring plans for Olympicopolis in Stratford.[33]

Olympic urbanism is also obfuscated by the proliferation and diffusion of Olympic cities. In 1929 the IOC asserted that 'the designated city can never share its privilege with any other city',[34] but this stipulation was relaxed in the IOC's 1980 Olympic Charter that offered the opportunity for Olympic hosts to stage events in other cities within the same country. This situation is now changing again as Agenda 2020 reforms agreed in 2014 encourage more efficient use of existing venues across entire regions. Spreading the Olympics across a wider metropolitan area, or multiple cities, inevitably means that any Olympic effect is less obvious. The introduction of subsidiary editions of the Games, including the Youth Olympic Games (first held in 2010), Youth Winter Games (2012) and the European Olympic Games (2015) also make it harder to identify Olympic urbanism. Indeed, whilst the IOC have always been keen to promote the enduring benefits of being an Olympic host – 'once an Olympic City, always an Olympic City' – this no longer holds. The host cities of the Youth Games, European Games or subsidiary hosts of the main editions lack the feel of Olympic cities. Given the IOC's obsession with heritage, and their new reliance

[29]Benneworth and Dauncey, "International Urban Festivals," 1094.
[30]See https://www.grandlyon.com/.
[31]Ren, "Aspirational Urbanism".
[32]See Gold and Gold, "Urban Segments and Event Spaces".
[33]Gardner, *A Contemporary Archaeology of London's Mega Events*; Gold and Gold, "Olympic Futures and Urban Imaginings". Olympicopolis has subsequently been rebranded as East Bank.
[34]Cited in Schut, Beaudouin, and Philippe, "Interaction Between Olympism and Host Cities".

on proven Olympic hosts (Beijing, London, Tokyo, Paris, Los Angeles), *bona fide* Olympic City status now seems to be reserved for those cities that have staged the Summer Games more than once.

## Opposition and new directions

Whilst Olympic projects have undoubtedly delivered some pioneering and highly influential examples of urban planning, there is an increasing amount of resistance to the Olympic Games in general and Olympic urbanism in particular. Alongside inevitable concerns about costs, much of this opposition is rooted in objections to the uncompromising size of the Games and the disruptive influence it has on incumbent residents and businesses. For many years, there has been talk of downsizing the Games, but this remains rhetoric rather than reality. Bloated scale – variously referred to as 'giantism' or 'gigantism' – emerged as a defining feature of the Olympics in the 1960s, when host cities built extravagant new venues, developed urban infrastructure and boasted about the number of participating athletes and nations. This was symbolized by Montreal 1976, when the 'Big O' (the nickname for the spectacular Olympic stadium) had morphed into the 'Big Owe' on account of the lastingly crippling debts incurred by the event.[35]

However, it is worth noting that in the twentieth century the epithet 'Olympic' was already a byword for scale, achievement and, not infrequently, self-conscious grandeur. For example, the famous trilogy of White Star transatlantic passenger ships, the *Titanic*, *Olympic* and *Britannic* were collectively known as Olympic class liners because of their record breaking size. Since the 1960s, Olympic-sized has also been used to describe any large (50-metre-long) swimming pool, further highlighting the indelible connection between the Olympics and giantism. Much like the aforementioned liners, it will take time and effort to turn these perceptions around.

One way the IOC has tried to counter criticism of the disruptive influence of the Games is to reconceive Olympic bidding and planning so that the Games can be an intervention that supports ongoing city plans. This helps to address the commonly cited concern that the host city tends to serve the Olympics, rather than the other way around. Early stagings of the Olympics, for example Paris 1924, certainly had more impact on the event's evolution that they did on the host city.[36] This unbalanced relationship has continued in some more recent editions, with 'successful' Games like the Los Angeles Games of 1984 doing more to revive the Olympic Games than the host city. In December 2014, Agenda 2020 reforms were agreed by the IOC which included more flexibility for cities to use the Games for their own ends. For example, at the centre of Brisbane's Olympic Legacy Strategy 'is the idea that the Games fit into the Host City and Region, not the other way around'.[37] This guiding principle is aided by the additional preparation time allocated to contemporary hosts – the Los Angeles 2028 Games and the Brisbane 2032 Olympics were awarded to their host cities eleven years before their Games, rather than the seven years that had previously been the norm. This is a major shift from the situation a century ago when Chamonix was awarded the Winter Olympics *9 months* before the start of the Games (see Franco, this volume)! Extending preparation time is linked to the desire to take advantage of a small number of willing hosts, but it does make it more feasible to integrate city planning and Olympic planning.

[35]Goldblatt, "The Games".
[36]Schut, Beaudouin, and Philippe, "Interaction Between Olympism and Host Cities".
[37]Brisbane 2032, "Elevate 2042," 8.

It remains unclear whether the IOC's newfound sensitivity to host city needs will actually deliver more positive legacies. Previous research on Olympic urbanism shows how commitments to long term strategic plans tend to get watered down as the Games approach.[38] As budgets tighten and with the world (and voters) watching, politicians tend to get overly fixated on staging a great Games. This means wider projects and priorities tend to be neglected. It is unlikely that this will change just because the IOC have encouraged cities to prioritize their own agendas. The new commitment to prioritize ongoing city plans also underestimates the planning flux that happens in the build up to an Olympic Games. For example, London's 2012 Games (awarded in 2005) were admirably driven by long held plans to transform east London, but a series of economic and political changes – including a new Mayor in 2008 and a new national government in 2010 – meant that, by 2012, the wider objectives for the Games had altered significantly.[39]

## Faster, higher, stronger?

Aside from their size and disruptive influence, Olympic urbanism is contested for other reasons too. Ironically, some of these criticisms can be linked to the Olympic motto *Citius, Altius, Fortius* ('Faster, Higher, Stronger'), first coined by a Dominican priest Henri Didon for a school sports event in 1881 and later purloined for the Olympic movement by Pierre de Coubertin, who was present at the event.[40]

*Faster*. Making change happen faster is often cited as an advantage of Olympic urbanism. For example, the organizers of Brisbane 2032 claim that 'hosting the Olympic and Paralympic Games is already accelerating development, fast tracking 20 years of housing supply into 10 years'.[41] Brisbane wants to use the Games to produce a 'faster' city in other ways too: connecting places better, thus 'enabling the faster movement of people, goods and ideas'.[42] However, fast paced urbanism is also the cause of many problems. Accelerated development leaves less time for public consultation and it can compromise the safety of those working on construction projects. It can also contribute to the kinds of chaotic, fragmented urbanism developed in the run up to the 2008 Olympic Games. According to Goldblatt: 'Beijing's transformation was so fast and furious that the city was issuing new maps every three months'.[43]

*Higher*. The aim of Olympic planners and developers to go higher is also problematic. In the modern era, tall Olympic structures (e.g. in Helsinki) had landmark status, but high-rise development it is now commonplace. Host city status and accompanying investment drives real estate speculation, and the resultant towers are also part of Olympic urbanism. According to Boykoff and Gaffney, during preparations for the 2020 Tokyo Games, 'local developers worked behind the scenes to leverage the Olympic state of exception to relax long time height restrictions on building in the neighbourhood around the National Stadium'.[44] During preparations for the 2008 Games, clusters of fragmented high-rise development 'popped up like mushrooms' in Beijing.[45] This phenomenon is not limited to Asian cities. In his review of London's ten worst skyscrapers, architectural critic Oliver Wainwright singles out Stratford for special attention:

[38]Smith, "Events and Urban Regeneration".
[39]Smith, "De-Risking East London".
[40]IOC, "What is the Olympic Motto?"
[41]Brisbane 2032, "Elevate 2042," 33.
[42]Ibid.
[43]Goldblatt, "The Games," 402.
[44]Boykoff and Gaffney, "The Tokyo 2020 Games and the End of Olympic History," 11.
[45]Goldblatt, "The Games".

> Like flies to a compost heap, developers swarmed to Stratford in the runup to the 2012 Olympics, each determined to build the 'gateway to the Games' and cash in on the legacy gold-rush. Paying over the odds for small plots, they had to go tall to claw back profits. The result is a physical bar chart of inflated land values: steroidal towers now march down the high street, each trying to be more iconic than the next, forming a shouty gauntlet of cheap coloured cladding panels and bolt-on balconies.[46]

*Stronger*. Many prospective host cities claim that the Olympic Games will make urban economies and communities stronger, but the reality has tended to be more complicated. Ongoing debts and the over-concentration of development in time and space (something that Monclùs[47] described as investment overdose) can unbalance cities, and disadvantaged communities tend to be displaced, divided and disrupted by Olympic projects. One of the aspects of cities that does tend to be stronger after hosting the Games is the provision of security and surveillance. This is one reason why some authors see the Olympic Games as a Trojan Horse – a vehicle for introducing controversial changes under the convenient cover of a mega sporting event.[48]

## Olympic futures

One potential future for Olympic urbanism that draws heavily on approaches pursued in the past is more use of temporary structures that are dismantled after the Games. The idea of staging a more ephemeral event mirrors the approach used in many early editions of the Olympic Games and reflects a wider trend for temporary and pop-up urbanism. In an era of austerity and climate crisis, iconic buildings designed by star-architects are understandably seen as less appropriate. Since the global financial crisis in 2008 there has been a discernible shift towards demountable structures and the provision of urban green spaces – neatly summarized by Cooke as a shift from 'starchitecture' to 'parkitecture'.[49] This transition is also evident in Olympic urbanism. Following the Beijing Games which was staged in extravagant arenas, the venues built by subsequent hosts (Sochi excepted) have been more modest, with more use of temporary structures. There are disadvantages of this approach, not least the cost of building structures that will be dismantled after the event. For example, the temporary arenas used for the London Games in 2012 cost more to build than some permanent venues.[50] Criticisms of temporary event structures tend to focus on the missed opportunities to leave positive legacies, especially as many vaunted plans to move structures to subsequent host cities have never really materialized. Therefore, one key challenge for Olympic planners is to design a new breed of low cost, low carbon demountable structures in ways that can still advance long term urban plans. Whilst this would represent progress, there is much to learn from how a similar philosophy was pursued by Olympic hosts between 1896 and 1924.

## Themes and contents

The papers that follow are concerned with Olympic urbanism's historical dimension, less in the sense of alignment in chronological order than in stressing the significance of the *longue durée* for historical analysis. Whether considering the 'authorized' versions of history propagated by the Olympic movement or the mounting wave of scholarship that has transformed Olympic studies over the past two decades, the historical view is ever present. It is not simply that we have papers

[46]Wainwright, "Horror Storeys".
[47]Monclus, "International Exhibitions and Planning".
[48]Smith and McGillivray, "The Long-Term Implications of Mega-Event Projects".
[49]Cooke, "Future Shift for 'Big Things".
[50]Smith, "Using Temporary Venues to Stage the Games".

spanning more than a century from Paris 1900 to Milan-Cortina 2026, it is also that these papers themselves are deeply expressive of precedent.

The collection opens with Kristo Vesikansa and Laura Berger's analysis of Helsinki's Olympic history. In outline, the city had bid unsuccessfully in 1936 for the 1940 Summer Games, but subsequently gained the nomination in 1938 when Tokyo relinquished its candidacy after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War. Helsinki 1940 also became a casualty of war, but the city did finally host the Olympics in 1952. Vesikansa and Berger indicate how a careful reading of the city's planning history can uncover the complex relationship between Olympic aspirations, urban planning, and national symbolism over a period of 30 years from the 1920s, when Finland first articulated its Olympic ambitions, to the final staging of the 1952 Games. They chart the way in which Olympic plans were repositioned during this period to fit the evolving urban strategy for Helsinki. They also show how the city presented the Olympic movement with the first athletes' villages (in 1940 and 1952) that were to provide a permanent legacy as housing. As such, Helsinki was in many ways a forerunner for the host cities that followed in its use of the Games as a catalyst for urban development.

The ensuing paper by Franco presents a case study of Chamonix, which in 2024 celebrated its centenary as the first Winter Games host.[51] It is easy to assume that this 'Winter sports week' would not require major spatial transformation given that it was held in an already established winter sports resort that had been hosting sports competitions since 1906. However, as Franco shows, considerable effort was required to provide facilities for three of the six disciplines (bobsleigh, ski jumping and skating). This paper examines the factors behind the planning decisions taken and the role played by environmental considerations – an interesting insight into how differently environmental matters were interpreted and accommodated at this time.

Like Helsinki, Tokyo had also started to prepare the city for the 1940 Games. As already noted, these did not occur, but Tokyo went on to host the 1964 and 2020 Games as well as bidding for the 1960 and 2016 Games. Languillon shows how these bids and stagings of the Games impacted not just on the urban form of Tokyo, but also on its planning culture, which is defined as the 'representations, imaginary and practices in the institutional stakeholders'. His paper examines the nature of planning culture over nine decades from the 1930s, tracing continuities and disjunctures between the plans for the Summer Games outlined in the three bids and two Olympics.

Beijing has achieved the rare distinction of hosting both a Summer and a Winter Games (2008 and 2022 respectively). Despite these two Games occurring within the space of 14 years, Hu argues that they took place under two contrasting urbanisms. The first was a growth discourse whose success in conventional economic terms saw the city ultimately became associated with pollution, congestion and poor living conditions. The second was a post-growth discourse prioritizing sustainability, balanced development and an approach focused on the wider region. This included the decentralization of Beijing, the creation of a new city 100 kilometres to the south of Beijing (the Xiong'an New Area), and the development of winter sports resorts to the north of the capital.

The next three papers consider emerging themes in the planning of Games: sustainability, legacy, giantism and security. Essex and Sanchez's paper highlights the growth of the sustainability agenda and the linked notion of legacy over the past 30 years, both institutionally in the adoption of sustainability policies by the IOC and in practice at the Games themselves. After detailed scrutiny of findings of Summer Games from London 2012 to Paris 2024, they conclude that the rhetoric has

[51] Although only recognised as such retrospectively by the IOC: see Essex "The Winter Games," 80.

been greater than the compliance with sustainability and legacy guidelines and that the IOC is in fact very poorly placed to enforce standards or issue sanctions for non-compliance.

Silvestre and his colleagues tackle the issue of Olympic growth and giantism, reviewing the notion of the 'Olympic City' from Coubertin's vision for the ideal setting for Olympic competition to the requirements articulated by the IOC through successive Olympic charters. Based on a longitudinal study of metrics for Tokyo 1964, Munich 1972 and Montreal 1976, they conclude that the finance required to stage the Olympics has skyrocketed at a pace that is out of proportion to the growth of budgets of host cities. This suggests that the Summer Games puts strains on the financial capacity of cities to host the Games successfully. Even with the recent IOC reforms the authors question whether enough has been done to keep the event within the reach of a wider range of possible host cities.

Coaffee looks at the question of security concerns in city planning for the Olympic Games from the 1970s onwards. Over this period, security practices have been 'designed into' the urban environment to counter terrorism, leaving a permanent physical legacy of protected public spaces which can subsequently be of use as part of general crime prevention strategies. This paper charts the evolution of security at the Olympics and the urban planners' role in embedding security into the urban fabric rather than superimposing temporary security features in and around Olympic venues and precincts.

The final three papers provide historical context for more recent Games: London 2012; Paris 2024; and the 2026 Milan Cortina Winter Games. Analysing bid activity by Paris for the 1992, 2008 and 2012 Summer Games, Strohmayer concludes that referring to a 'failed bid' is a misnomer as these non-successful or abandoned bids in fact do impact on urban planning and leave a real legacy for the city. Looking particularly at the proposals for athletes' villages, for instance, he points out the complexity of identifying suitably large sites and devising plans with the multiple actors involved. Each bid focused on different areas of Paris – 1992 the east, 2008 the northeast and 2012 the northwest of the city. The vision underpinning these proposals impacted on subsequent land use.

Doustaly and Zembri-Mary examine the three Games for which Paris successfully gained the nomination (1900, 1924 and 2024), drawing interesting parallels with the experience of London, itself a three-time venue for the Olympic Games (1908, 1948 and 2012). The time period covered offers the opportunity to analyse the evolving political, economic, institutional and planning contexts of these Games. In particular, by looking at these Games through the lens of sustainability practices, conclusions are drawn as to the economic, environmental and social sustainability impacts and legacies of the six Games. The authors argues that 2024 marks a shift back towards 'a more sober Games', with greater sensitivity to the needs of local communities, but question whether future Games will continue on this trajectory.

The final paper examines the plans for the 2026 Milan-Cortina Winter Olympics, Games where the bidding and planning of the Games have been shaped by Agenda2020 and the New Norm. Raco and Di Vita's analysis considers the Italian experience of hosting mega-events particularly the instrumental use of Summer and Winter Games, the FIFA World Cup, International Expos and European Cities of Culture. In terms of the Olympics, the Games of Cortina 1956 and Rome 1960 were relatively concentrated projects compared to the regional approach taken for Turin 2006 and Milan 2026. Milan combines two trends in Winter Games hosting: the use of larger host cities combined with investing further in a winter resort previously used for the Games. However, the authors challenge the simplistic assumption that the New Norm will provide a paradigm to prevent costly, contentious and unsustainable planning solution to Olympic hosting.

A number of common themes emerge from these papers including, *inter alia*, bidding, budgeting, scale, concentration versus dispersal, land use, security, legacy and sustainability, but

underpinning them all is the need for historical awareness when analysing or evaluating any city's Olympic experience. Each of these common themes unfolds over the course of an extended time frame, which can be thirty years or more from a city thinking about a bid to the realization of legacy. Each of these themes too affect the dynamics of urban planning for the host cities in ways that are not always predictable and can impact upon the intangibilities of urban imagination, planning culture and urban design.

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