Urbanalisation and city mega-events: from copy&paste urbanism to urban creativity

Francesc Muñoz, Department of Geography, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, UAB.

Contemporary urban mega-events.

The urban transformation of cities in the Western world over the course of the 20th century cannot be separated from the organisation of urban mega-events. International exhibitions, world fairs, or the Olympic Games are three paradigmatic examples of this form of guiding the growth and transformation of cities.[1]

This chapter explores the management process of a model of urban intervention that evolved during the 20th century, forming a specific type of policy that will be considered in the first section. Given the limited space available, I will only be considering the Olympic Games. These serve as a clear example of an urban mega-event which brings forth a truly unique type of intervention in the city, to such an extent that we may even speak of 'Olympic urbanism' (Muñoz, 1997; 2005; 2006).

The second section looks at a significant change in the last third of the 20th century in relation to the role of mega-events in processes of urbanisation and change in cities. Two dynamics are especially responsible for this change in how cities have reformulated the role of mega-events in relation to urban policies: on the one hand, the definitive rise in the dynamics of economic, political, cultural, and urban globalisation. On the other hand, the progressive emergence of what I have called *urbanalisation* (Muñoz, 2008; 2009), referring to the global expansion of *copy&paste* urbanism, which achieves its development all over the world through urban mega-events.

The main results of these changes in terms of major urban events contain four primary elements:

-   Firstly, the banalisation of the events, which cease to present an inaugural, colonising, unique, and one-off nature, to become just another element in a festivalised urban normality.

-   Secondly, from a model of mega-events closely associated with large modern industrial metropolises, there is a shift towards the multiplication of all types of urban events taking place in different types of cities, fed by the sectoral expansion of which the events with the greatest impact are the protagonists. The normality with which medium-sized cities end up becoming cultural capitals or world headquarters for events linked to all types of economic sectors and issues of social interest – from fashion to sports, from politics to art – is convincing evidence of this.

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[1] This is not the place for a detailed explanation of the nature of these canonical urban events and their global hierarchy. A deeper discussion could allow us to establish conclusions on the differences between the three mega-events mentioned here but also to discuss the peculiarity of events that start as local but that, thanks to their repetition over time and to their capacity to connect with issues of a global interest, have acquired importance and predominance in recent decades. This would be the case of the different International Building Exhibitions, the German IBAs, whose last edition was closed in 2013 in HafenCity, Hamburg.

- Thirdly, there is a change in the role that the urban image played in urban planning and policies in the 20th century. If before the image served to economically publicise, socially communicate, or culturally build the narrative of urban change, its role would develop until becoming the first and main requirement to enable processes of change and transformation in the city.

- Lastly, that importance of the image causes the large-scale event to assume a primordial function as an element that changes not so much the space of the city as, above all else, its image. That is, even if a physical transformation is produced in the urban space, something which is obvious in the majority of experiences of the organisation of urban mega-events, the main benefit for the city is not, as was the case in the 20th century, its mere physical transformation. Instead, it provides the urban space with a new image, contributing to the overexposure of the city in the world market of urban snapshots on which the sectors that sustain the globalised economy feed: from tourism to urban entertainment-leisure, and the wide array of products linked to what authors such as Andrew Darley have called the new, and no less global, 'visual digital culture' (Darley, 2000).

Finally, in the conclusions section, three hypotheses are proposed on the future of the urban mega-event in the city of the 21st century as well as some alternatives to guide it in terms of urban innovation and creativity, thus escaping the *copy&paste* urbanism typical of processes of *urbanalisation*.

The city and large-scale events: the example of Olympic urbanism

This is not the place to delve into a detailed discussion of the Olympic Games as an urban mega-event. At other points, there have already been discussions on how the organisation of the Olympics in the 20th century goes beyond the limits of a sporting event and presents many other elements. For example, how the management of the Olympics came to determine a model of urban intervention that allowed for the formulation of a specific type of urbanism: 'Olympic urbanism'.

Within the array of actions that shape this Olympic urbanism, the construction of the Olympic Village clearly stands out. This is a new urban artefact that allows for the clear establishment of the relationship between urbanism and the communication of a specific urban image. It is, in fact, in the Olympic Village that architecture is more clearly used for the image that the city organising the event wants to project internationally. In this sense, the building typologies, the formal languages, and the design itself of the spaces form part of an urban landscape specifically conceived to highlight both the current values of modernity and those that are specific to the place. At the same time, the architecture of the Olympic Villages manifests the ambition to reproduce – in a controlled way, and in a reduced and enclosed space – the urban models and architectural proposals that encounter too much rigidity and too many difficulties within the real space of the city to be put into practice. Thus, throughout the 20th century, the Olympic Villages cease to be ephemeral constructions; like the military barracks or camps that characterised the first modern Olympics. They would also cease to be defined as temporary accommodation in the city. Since the decade of the 1930s and, above all, after the Second World War, the Olympic Villages would become new constructions, first thought of as part of the process of expanding the city over the territory and, later, as transformations of the existing built urban fabric, characterised by durability and the ambition to build new urban areas.

In this way, and in conclusion, the process of urban construction linked to the celebration of the Olympic Games gained in complexity throughout the 20ᵗʰ century. Initially, we were dealing with a series of well-defined elements strictly related to the practice of the different competitions, as is the case of the stadium and the specialised facilities for the different Olympic sports. However, urban protocols and strategies would appear over time, allowing for talk of the consolidation of a specific type of urbanism related to the Games, in which the role of the Olympic Village as a primary urban element would become more and more relevant.

Defining the Olympic Village model: a 20ᵗʰ century story[2]

The Olympic Games of before and after the first world war – London (1908), Stockholm (1912), Antwerp (1920), Paris (1924), and Amsterdam (1928) – responded to the problem of accommodation with what we could define as an emergency residential menu, formed by different types of temporary residences, sometimes including even the same boats that had carried the athletes from their countries of origin. While in Paris-1924 a first and modest Olympic Village was tested – a group of wooden barracks close to the Stadium of Colombes with some additions like postal and telegraph services – the first real Olympic Village was built in Los Angeles for the 1932 Olympics. Together with the Olympic Village of Berlin in 1936, it represents what I have called 'inaugural Olympic Villages' (Muñoz, 1997; 2005; 2006), establishing the basic model of accommodation that would be reproduced in subsequent Olympic Games: a multifunctional structure that, as well as providing accommodation and basic care for the athletes, included facilities such as entertainment areas, spaces for rest and physical care, and leisure areas.

After the Second World War, it was not until the 1960s that the Villages in Rome (1960) or Mexico (1968) would introduce new complex elements to the morphology and functions of the basic model of the Olympic Village inaugurated in Los Angeles and Berlin.[3] Certainly, the Olympics in Rome meant a change in relation to previous events from the point of view of Olympic urbanism. For the first time, there was a regional conception of the urban and behind the decisions of the location of the Olympic facilities and constructions there was also a project for the territorial expansion of the city. Thus, the Olympic Village inserted itself into a programme of residential zoning that went far beyond the immediate solution to the temporary accommodation of the athletes; something that, from then on, would be a common denominator of subsequent Olympic Villages.

Therefore, with Rome-1960 the architectural form of the Olympic Village became a key element in the projection of the city's image. In fact, the Olympic Games themselves, as an urban mega-event, would change considerably from the second half of the 20ᵗʰ century on, experiencing a process of internationalisation and commercialisation of their contents that would acquire a worldwide dimension over time.

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[2] For a detailed study of the history, typology, and urban functionality of the Olympic Villages during the 20th century see Muñoz, Francesc (1997). For an illustration of the architectural projects and urban planning programmes of the most relevant and most recent Olympic Villages with plenty of images see Muñoz, Francesc (2005).

[3] Thus, the Olympic Villages in London (1948), Helsinki (1952), or Melbourne (1956) are characterised by a return to the use of ephemeral constructions or of military camps, or by programmes that took advantage of part of the social housing included in the cities' urban plans.

Thus, the globalisation of the consumption of sporting events went hand in hand with the planning of real sports districts understood as yet another formula for extending or transforming the city. Olympic urbanism would become, consequently, part of ambitious urban development programmes and the architecture involved would guarantee not only the functionality of the projects but, above all, the spectacle of the urban image as added value.

Evidence of this evolution is found in the Olympic Villages of the 1970s – Munich (1972) and, above all, Montreal (1976) – which, unlike those of the previous decade, were not considered from the point of view of urban growth but of rezoning and renovation in the already existing city.

The Olympic Villages of the last two decades of the 20th century consisted of a mixed set of actions: the experience of programming planned in Moscow (1980) and Barcelona (1992) contrast with the more ephemeral approaches of the university villages in Los Angeles (1984) or Atlanta (1996). In the case of Moscow, the Olympic Village was considered in the capital's 1971-1990 Development Plan, within the 10th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development. This included programmes that divided the city into eight planning zones, the development of which was accelerated by Moscow being named host of the Olympics.

The interventions in Seoul and Barcelona, although different, share in their integration of Olympic urbanism into plans for the recuperation of large urban areas like Jamsil – a flood zone on the bank of the Han River – and the waterfront of Poblenou, the old industrial heart of the 19th century city in the case of Barcelona. On the other hand, in Los Angeles-1984 we find the opposite, with a minimum impact Olympic urbanism with only four new constructions among the 21 sports facilities.

Thus, no Olympic Village was built and the athletes were housed in three university campuses. This is a minimalist format that was reproduced in Atlanta-1996, where the facilities of the Georgia Institute of Technology were used as the Village, complemented by the construction of the 'Village Festival Centre', a large shopping-mall, and the 'Olympic towers', two apartment blocks that completed the residential offer.

Lastly, the Olympic Villages of the beginning of the 21st century – Sidney (2000), Athens (2004), Beijing (2008), and London (2012) – clearly show examples of some of the main urbanism approaches found today. For example: the impact of globalisation on the architecture and image of urban projects, with a clear predominance of international firms with the capacity to create a recognised brand; the tendency towards spectacle in the shaping of the architectural design and definition of spaces; the concern with environmental sustainability; and the landscape integration of the buildings.

Large-scale urban events and urbanalisation

As shown in the case of Olympic urbanism, large-scale events have formalised a series of quite stable urban intervention protocols during the 20th century in terms of the organisation and territorial and physical results of the event itself. At the same time, during the last third of the 20th century cities, encouraged by the intensity of economic and urban globalisation dynamics, have redefined the role of large events in relation to urban policies.

In this sense, four major changes stand out:

- The banalisation of large-scale urban events.
- The sectoral expansion of urban events and their territorial multiplication in the cities that organise them.
- The change of the place occupied by the urban image during the 20th century in terms of the process of the production of cities.
- The reduction and simplification of the large urban event, now merely serving to update the city's image.

Before looking at each of these four transformations, it is worth briefly presenting an explanation of the context of urban landscape production in recent decades on the basis of the development of architecture and urbanism projects that shape what I have called *urbanalisation*.

Urbanalisation: the urban form of the post-industrial city?

Landscape has traditionally been understood as the morphological translation of the physical features and the social and cultural relationships that define a place and shape the so-called *genius loci*. However, cities are currently facing the emergence of landscapes which are clearly independent from place in the sense that they can be replicated in any other city. In this context, landscapes no longer translate the features of the place as could be expected, nor do they contain cultural or symbolic attributes related to social identification and cohesion.

This process of disconnection between place and landscape can be summarised with the idea of *urbanalisation* that has characterised the recent evolution of cities. The main results of *urbanalisation* can be easily observed in some specific urban scenarios such as historical inner cities or urban waterfronts.

Regarding the transformation of historical neighbourhoods, gentrification processes have gone hand in hand with the progressive orientation of urban space towards leisure and consumption, resulting in a very dramatic transformation of the local urban landscape. Different urban regeneration programmes and renewal projects have been developed in a very similar way in different cities bringing about a kind of *copy&paste* urban form which the global visitor of the local historical area has in mind and hopes to find when perceiving this specific part of the urban landscape.[4]

In terms of urban renewal in waterfronts and riverside areas, common highly standardised architectural and urban design programmes have been implemented worldwide revealing a very restricted menu of options when we look at the urban structures resulting from those projects: the aquarium and the new marina, the shopping area, the leisure sector, the IMAX cinema, the local museum or cultural centre, and the high-rise residential areas facing the water.

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[4] This is something that was anticipated by authors like John Urry many years ago when discussing the specific nature of the visitor's gaze with regard to the cityscape. Urry's *tourist gaze* concept still explains very well today the way in which previously constructed expectations of the urban landscape strongly shape the visitor's perception of the urban experience.

These elements shape a brand-new urban seafront which also appears as 'copied and pasted' from one waterfront to another when comparing different key examples since the 1980s; from the well-known Baltimore experience to the long list of different projects in Europe and, more recently, in Asia. This general evolution is the result of a structural trend in the recent urban history of contemporary cities: the progressive conversion of urban historical centres and waterfronts into places for consumption, entertainment, and other activities linked to global tourism. That is to say, the city's traditional spaces – the architectural setting, the topological elements like streets and squares, which have historically characterised the compact city as vibrant public spaces – are transformed following very similar patterns of intervention that present a highly standardised type of urban experience. A very interesting paradox arises here:

During the last half century, leisure and consumption spaces have been intensively recreating and imitating urban atmospheres and formal features of cityscapes: the street, the square, the boulevard, the park, etc… Nowadays, it seems that cities, in order to be successful as places to be visited and consumed, need to imitate that urban form, already based on imitations of the city spaces themselves, found in shopping malls, festival markets, or theme-parks. This is a process that contributes to and reinforces the standardisation of urban landscapes. In this sense, the majority of urban renovation experiences have caused common results such as the economic and functional specialisation of formerly complex urban areas, the morphological segregation of the urban form, and the thematisation of the urban landscape. These three elements characterise *urbanalisation.*

In conclusion, the recognisable urban form of the compact city, those areas where topological elements like streets or squares contribute to the urban fabric, are also converted into specialised containers. Despite the morphology of the city being maintained, the urban functions have been simplified in a thematic way. Even though the residential function remains, historical areas affected by regeneration programmes have acquired a new function: they have been renewed as spaces not to be inhabited but to be visited. A more recent example illustrating this process of *urbanalisation* can be observed in the urban renewal affecting Jewish ghettos in Eastern Europe. These old neighbourhoods have been renovated following a very similar pattern in different cities and offering a final scene where the historical urban form is merely the visual support for a highly specialised use of the space aimed towards leisure, entertainment, and consumption (Murzyn-Kupisz, 2009). The results of these renovation experiences reveal a city which has been simplified in terms of its attributes and contents. Similar results can be observed in many experiences of urban renovation in historical centres and waterfronts in Europe.[5]

Paradoxically, both had been the spaces most culturally identified with the attributes characterising the urban form of the traditional city. Nowadays, they show the progressive loss of urban diversity and complexity due to the recent evolution of the urban form.

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[5] The urban iconography created by cinema, for example, has always shown key contents of urban life present in these two specific landscapes: density, intensity, relationships, hazard, chance, or conflict. A film with a very meaningful title, *On the waterfront,* by Elia Kazan (1954), is a very good example. From the very beginning to the end, the association between the city and the port is clearly present and the previously mentioned city attributes characterise the action.

As mentioned, many times and in fact proposed by important names in European architecture like Aldo Rossi, the urban regeneration projects developed in European cities since the decade of the 1980s were based on the morphology of the historic city, proposing its renovation in accordance with new forms of life at the end of the 20th century. On the other hand, the urbanism linked to *urbanalisation* represents the opposite: the definitive abandonment of the historicist model and an embrace of the logo-architecture typical of globally triumphant tourist resorts, visible and 'clonable' from the coast of Florida to Moscow, from Macao to any of the *Nike towns* built in the Bahamas or the coast of Vancouver.

Four changes in the relationship between the urban mega-event and the city

As stated earlier, we are interested in highlighting four important changes that have affected the nature of the large-scale urban event and its place in urban policies, considering the global context of the processes of *urbanalisation* commented on above.

These four changes are: the banalisation of the urban mega-event; its sectoral expansion and diversification in the territory; the change of the place and nature of the urban image in relation to the process of urban production; and the predominant role of the urban mega-event as mobiliser and catalyst of the brandified city image.

Now we will briefly look at each of these issues.

The banalisation of the urban mega-event

The process of the festivalisation of urban space, explained by some authors like Marco Venturi (1994) or Darrel Crilley (1993) 20 years ago, has ended up assimilating urban policies into the organisation and management of different types of events. This explains many interesting issues like, for example, the importance of urban marketing and branding initiatives or, also, the need to almost constantly update the city's image. This allows us to see that the large event has lost a significant part of the quasi-epic elements it presented during the last century, when it was attributed with an inaugural – in the sense of the beginning of a new urban era – or a colonising meaning – in the sense of incorporating new territories into the city. It could be said that the large-scale event is thus integrated, in a quasi-natural way, into what is nothing other than a banalised urban normality by means of festivals and hotspots, in which what is extraordinary becomes ordinary almost at the same time as it is formalised in the urban space[6].

The idea of *urbanalisation* explained previously frames this process according to which the events, organised on the basis of the same recipes, are replicated in some cities when their celebration has not yet ended in others. Without a doubt, these processes clearly show the different faces of the globalisation of economies and cultures that holds a privileged niche in cities. It is something that authors like John Hannigan or Naomi Klein have shown when explaining the processes of brandification both of modes of consuming urban spaces and of transforming the city.

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[6] John Ploger (2001) explored these ideas taking into consideration the example of the urban projects proposed in different cities when celebrating the new millennium in the year 2000. The results of this 'millenium urbanism' clearly show the relationship between the urban policies and an urban narrative based upon the organisation of city events.

The sectoral expansion of the urban event and its territorial multiplication

But this banalisation of the major urban event is, in fact, fed by the second change that I highlighted earlier: the sectoral and territorial expansion of these events. The event model associated with urban projects and the cultural affirmation of large modern industrial metropolises has been substituted in less than thirty years by the spread of different types of events related to the most diverse economic, political, social, and cultural interests, which take place, moreover, in a wide array of cities of different types and with different positions in global hierarchies. For example, the different types of 'capital status' – of culture, of art, of sport, or of a specific economic framework – that exist today, and the new possibilities for organising urban events that indicate extreme stratification and specialisation. We have cities like Bruges, as the European Capital of Culture, Valencia, with global sporting events like the celebration of the America's Cup, or the long chain of cultural events in cities like Edinburgh, with its performing arts festival, or Barcelona, with the Festival of Advanced Music, SONAR.

These examples are among those that confirm that practically every economic sector today has its own event – from mobile telephone fairs to those of the construction or tourism sectors – every topic of interest in urban life thus has an event serving as a point of reference – from biennial art and fashion shows to those for cooking and architecture. Of course, these small-scale types of events cannot be compared to the canonical urban mega-events cited at the beginning. However, they do contribute, with their almost daily and persistent occupation of urban space and time, to taking the symbolic and cultural dimension away from major modern events that seem today to be dissolved in the festivalised normality we alluded to earlier. The theorists of the 'liquid society', like Marshall Berman or Zigmunt Bauman, are finally being proved right.

The alteration of the nature of the city's image in the urban process

The third big change refers to a fact that is essential for understanding the decisive need that urban policies have today to establish a certain type of urban image or, to be more precise, an image understood as a brand for the global façade projected by the city. This third change can be summarised as the definitive alteration of the place occupied by image in the process of urban production (Muñoz, 2008), and its complexity and importance demand a sufficiently detailed explanation.

From the middle of the 19th century and during a large part of the 20th century, the image was a secondary element in the process of the construction of cities, in a way that there was a clear differentiation between the circuit of production, urbanisation, and occupation of urban land, and the narrative device that used images to explain to the population how the city was transforming. This is a mechanism that became progressively more efficient as photography, first, and moving images, later, reduced the time previously needed by literature or painting to capture the process of urban change inevitably linked to the idea of modernity and closely associated with the realisation of large events.[7]

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[7] This is something we can clearly appreciate if we compare the different narrative-explicative powers of two contemporary works that tackle the topic of urban change in Berlin, one of the European metropolises that experienced the most and the fastest changes in the first decades of the 20th century: the documentary film *Berlin, symphony of a great city* (1927), by Walter Ruttmann, in comparison to the work *In Berlin* by Franz Hessel (1929).

Thus, when it came to the physical transformation of the city that the organisation of the mega-event brought with it, first the city was transformed. Afterwards, the image, which either documented the process of destruction-construction or narrated it in terms of collective history, using exercises in nostalgia or criticism of the new modern urban space resulting from the change in the urban landscape. In the majority of cases, however, the image often validated the urban change as irrefutable evidence of material progress, above all if that urban transformation derived from the celebration of large events.

Today, the role of the image in relation to that process of urban production has been completely inverted. The image is no longer that documentary or narrative tool, external to urban transformation, but has become the main requirement in order for the transformation to be produced. Consequently, its temporal location also changes so that the image is not constructed and socialised after the urban change but the complete opposite: it is the construction of an urban image which enables, in fact, the physical and real transformation of the city.

We are dealing with a clearly complex phenomenon whose detailed explanation cannot be tackled in this text[8], but in whose origins the advertising use of the image which was consolidated in the 20th century plays a relevant role.

Over time, the association of the use of the image with the promotion and sale of a consumer good would also become common in the case of urban images. The symbolic sale of the city would thus be the main priority of a series of innovative proposals that, especially since the second half of the 20th century, would consolidate a model of mass communication that promotes and illuminates a series of urban images marginalising others and relegating them to the shadows.

From the promotional videos already developed in the first decades of the century in relation to international fairs and universal exhibitions to the birth of urban marketing, first, and city branding, later, we can trace the limits of the branding of the urban image that explains the alteration of the role and positioning of the image in relation to the city, as alluded to earlier. In effect, *brandification* operates in the same way whether we are dealing with a trainer, a yogurt, or a city.

Having a brand image or, to be clearer, a brand made into an image, is a necessary condition for any type of product; it is that image that provides the optimum conditions for symbolic identification and individual appropriation needed by global consumption. This is a consumption habit that does not represent, in reality, the consumption of objects, but that of the experiences and emotions associated with the images that advertise them.

Thus, in the same way that the brand image of a pair of trainers or a yogurt ensure their commercial success, every city searches for its own brand image to sustain the process of commercialisation of urban attributes and the sale of place associated with the main processes of current urban transformation. This includes the gentrification of urban centres and urban sprawl in residential peripheries, as well as the renovation of waterfronts and the creation of commercial value for old first-generation industrial districts.

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[8] For a more detailed explanation of the reversal of the role of image in relation to processes of city production, see Muñoz, Francesc (2008; 2009).

All of this explains why, same as with the trainers or the yogurt, the city needs to build an image with sufficient brand potential, an urban brand with the capacity to become an image, because the possibility for the physical transformation of the urban space depends on it.

In the same way that the image associated with a successful brand substantially improves the perception of the physical attributes of the trainer or the yogurt, regardless of their real quality, the brandified urban image allows for the physical transformation of the city to be validated automatically. Thus, there is no evaluation of the meanings, impacts, and consequences of the urban change, it only needs to correspond to some extent with the brand image previously created and promoted. In this sense, when we confirm that the urban image is now nothing other than an image-brand, we also see that the international market of urban images has developed to such an extent that practically everything can be used to create an attractive brand: from the local cuisine to the architecture, from the attributes of the environment to the characteristics of the inhabitants themselves.

We now know of many examples of specific real estate projects and even new neighbourhoods that appear in different cities promoted and associated with a specific brand, sometimes even accompanied by a commercial logo that can be used subsequently in the commercialisation of other products. This happened in New York in areas like TRIBECA – Triangle Below Canal – or in the north of the Little Italy neighbourhood, christened by developers as NOLITA (Northern Little Italy), an urban project that has even generated a clothing brand for young people with the same name (i.e., with the same brand) and which can be found in any shopping area in any European city. Other examples include: Berlin, after the fall of the Wall, where it is currently difficult to differentiate whether *Mitte* is the name of a neighbourhood or of a sponsor; London's *Brick Lane*, the central street of the East End, which is also another clear example; and Bilbao, where perhaps we will find future urban projects with names like *Mosel*, the decoration and accessories shop specialised in Italian and Nordic design now installed in the city.

Urban branding thus represents another step on the path started decades ago by marketing. A step which consists of summarising urban images in labels, in brands, and making the city landscape subsequently adjust itself to them.

The role of the mega-event as a mobiliser and catalyst of the urban image

The last of the four changes that are proposed here to understand the current relationship between large-scale events and urban policies has to do with the simplification of the urban event in terms of merely serving to update the city's image. That is, precisely because of everything explained in the previous point, the role of the large-scale urban event has gone from constituting a highly significant moment for the transformation and history of the city to presenting a much more instrumental function, as a support element for the necessary updating of the brand image of the city, regardless of the type of physical transformation that may be produced as a consequence of its celebration.

The case of the last Olympic Games in London in 2012 is very significant in this sense as, apart from all of the important physical transformations that the Olympic project meant for the east of the city, the main asset of the transformation programme referred to the promotion of a change in the urban image of the areas that border the Thames in that part of the city.

This association between event and urban image, and not so much the physical reality of the city, is what enables and gives rise to a whole series of proposals that would have been unthinkable previously, when the event required stronger links with the material urban substratum.[9]

Thus, since 2008 and up until two years ago Valencia hosted a part of the Formula One competition thanks to a new urban circuit created in the city. The final image so clearly recalled the situation in Monte Carlo that, in fact, for a few weeks the image of that city was reproduced as well as, to a certain extent, its appearance as an urban brand.

What is interesting about this case is that the city already had an existing circuit in use in the suburbs but the pull of the brand image, and what attracted the global capital represented by the current Formula One business lobby, was the possibility of having the circuit in the city; in the most central urban area. On the other hand, the last editions of the Winter Olympic Games have stood out due to their celebration in cities that do not have the natural and landscape attributes strictly necessary for the practice of those sports. In fact, both in Torino (2006) and in Vancouver (2010), the resorts and facilities were in other places but the city assumed the brand image as Winter Olympics city despite the fact that its physical and material reality literally could not host the event.

This is appreciated with even more clarity in the case of Barcelona, which, despite not exactly having the necessary features, posed itself as a candidate in the initial phase of the Winter Olympic Games for 2022, proposing to carry out the corresponding competitions in the ski resorts of the Pyrenees.

These examples demonstrate the real possibilities of relocation and de-anchoring presented today by major urban events, which are turned into something portable and transportable from one city to another and considered almost in 'take-away' terms.

Events in the city-event: three hypotheses on the future of the urban mega-event

Throughout the previous pages, I have explained a fact that I consider especially relevant for understanding the current relationship between large-scale events and the city. The last 150 years have given rise to the consolidation of an urban mega-event model, loyally represented by the universal and international exhibitions or the Olympic Games.

This same period has witnessed that model's crisis as it has lost some of its foundational characteristics, redefined its functionality and attributes, and shaped a new kind of scenario in its relationship with urban policies, in general, and with the processes of the transformation of the city, in particular.

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[9] The association between big events and the urban image has at times come to determine even small details of spatial physical shape based on the needs and requirements of visual consumption. Thus, in the Olympic Village in Los Angeles (1984) sophisticated simulation exercises were used to recreate the urban landscape using decorative elements in public spaces. From using a palette of 'Mediterranean' colours in the design of visual elements and the urban furniture to the use of signage conceived not only to be seen by visitors but also on the television screen. In this regard, see Muñoz, Francesc (1997; 2005).

Thus, as explained above, traditional large events have lost a large part of their unique or inaugural nature to become urban moments that, though they are clearly mobilising – in terms of economic energies, collective imagination, or political consensus – tend more and more to dissolve into a temporary urban nature characterised by the quasi-continuous presence of events of all types and formats. As I have shown, this banalisation of the event has to do with its sectoral expansion and territorial multiplication but, above all, it is a result of the new role acquired by image in relation to the process of urban production. That, and nothing else, is what explains the simplification of the major event, progressively reduced until merely serving as a means to update the city's image.

In this context of change, it is worth questioning the future of large urban events and their relationship with the city. Lacking the epic aura associated with the construction of the city and associated, on the other hand, with the process of production and updating of the city's brand image, can we understand them today as anything more than a mere instrumental support tool for globalised urban branding?

In that regard, and as a final discussion, I propose three hypotheses that may be validated by a simple look at the urban scenarios of the current period:

Firstly, the reduction of the contents of large events, which prioritise their commitment to the mobilisation of the local image and imagination over all other functions, will continue and will become even more evident. This is due to a large extent to the fact that the process of the emergence and dissemination of events has not come to an end, not at all. It would almost appear that the multiplication of urban events now forms part of a new instructions manual on how to plan and inhabit the city, in such a way that we could imagine a future urban space almost continuously characterised by the attention and the interest demanded by one event or another.

In fact, this would be a logical and expected step if we look at what has occurred with other equally defining and characteristic dynamics of the modern city, which now in the new *post-metropolitan* phase, in the words of Edward Soja, have lost their old exceptional nature and have acquired a quasi-spatial-temporal permanence. This happens, in effect, with global tourism or the access, no less global, to information. It can be foreseen, therefore, that the same may happen with large urban events.

Secondly, although urban mega-events need a strong local consensus and their success is still measured in terms of the local response during and after their organisation, it is likely that the new century is inaugurating a new event model, characterised by a shift towards the progressively more important presence of a global public in cities. This is a confirmed fact which can be explained on the basis of two of the processes that most strongly feed the dynamics of globalisation. Firstly, the strength of global tourism flows, which allows us to speak of 'major events tourism'; a specific type of tourism that, on occasion, is even positioned as the cornerstone for consolidating a concrete event in the urban calendar. Secondly, transnational migrations are modifying the urban and social structure of many cities, at times even reformulating cultural categories until now fenced in, like 'cosmopolitanism', and ensuring a type of population defined by a very clear awareness of the global world we live in. If this is the case, a fundamental change could be produced in the shape and nature of the large urban event since, as an important image mobiliser, we could question the urban imagination that may be projected by major events in the future.

This imagination could be closer to that anchored in the place, belonging to the inhabitants of the city, or to that of the *territoriantes* (Muñoz, 2002; 2008); those populations that, occasionally but in an intense and almost continuous way, maintain the share quota of urban events with their loyalty. In this sense, the closing ceremony of the last Olympic Games in London in 2012 would confirm these perspectives if we look at the clearly global character – the emphasis placed on things like commercial pop music or digital technology – of much of the spectacle.

Thirdly, the growing ubiquity of urban events invites us to consider a final hypothesis looking at the relationship between these events and urban policies. Thus, on the one hand, it seems obvious that there are clear difficulties for proposing new types of large urban events. The trilogy of consolidated events previously mentioned, formed by international exhibitions, world fairs, and the Olympic Games, has been maintained throughout the last 150 years and still enjoys good health, which can be seen in the unceasing requests from many very different cities to host these events. Leaving aside these main mega-events, the truth is that only some sporting events – like the football world cup championships – and cultural events – like the European capitals of culture or the, limited, main film festivals, for example – reach a truly global presence and turnover. On the other hand, the perspective is exactly the opposite in the case of smaller events associated with specific elements of economic, political, social, and cultural activity. In this case, the hypothesis could be considered in almost absolute terms saying that practically any city in the world at any time could host an urban event, given that the only important element will be its capacity to mobilise and update the city's image and the urban imagination.

Urban mega-events and the new agenda of cities

As we have seen, the three hypotheses coincide in highlighting the role of the urban mega-event as an instrument for managing the urban image in its different aspects. This is a function which brings the mega-event too close to the coordinates of *urbanalisation* as we have explained it here. Against this clearly reductionist and simplifying role and function of the major event, there are at least two challenges for the current city that could be visualised first and materialised later on the basis of the organisation of urban mega-events.

Both challenges have to do with necessarily updating the idea of urban regeneration: Firstly, understanding that the transformation of an urban area is not an end in itself but a means to generate new dynamics in the city understood as a whole. In this sense, Barcelona constitutes a very good example of how an Olympic mega-event not only changes the image of the city but also transforms a peripheral area both in its physiognomy and in its nature, thus equally changing its relationship with the rest of the city. Therefore, associating the organisation of urban mega-events with the transformation not only of isolated urban elements but to that of the city as a whole, including urban, social, and cultural issues, constitutes an important challenge for cities that are willing to organise mega-events in the immediate future. Secondly, accepting that the idea of canonical urban regeneration developed since the 1980s in the urban policies of European cities needs urgent updating to introduce a series of questions that were not at all put on the urban agenda of cities thirty years ago. Perhaps the hottest issue, in this sense, is that of the new problems associated with the combination 'sustainability-technology' and, more specifically, the new requirements of urban resilience that the now recognised climate change risk represents for more than a few cities.

Thus, the merely environmental questions normally labelled with the adjective 'sustainable', are giving way to clearly innovative topics related to the resilience capacity of cities and to the urgent need to consider urbanism in terms of energy efficiency, low levels of carbon emissions, and criteria for adaptation to or mitigation of climate change. These are challenges that are now becoming popular on the basis of concepts like 'low carbon' or 'climate proof' urbanism.

The last Olympic Games in London already explored these questions connecting sustainability and resilience through the design of Olympic facilities that would reduce their dimensions and capacity after the games, adapting themselves thus in a resilient way to the post-Olympic moment. Also, the criteria of environmental sustainability were clearly present up to the point that their consideration explained in part the relatively low presence of iconic and spectacular architecture, so characteristic of the celebration of these types of global urban mega-events. It is true that London is already a city with an elevated quota of unique and remarkable architecture, but it is also true that the global display that the Olympic Games represents always presents the temptation to resort to architecture-spectacle as one of the ingredients, when not the main one, of the urban transformation project.

Far from this, the urban planning programme in the East End clearly showed an environmental aesthetic that, beyond technical issues like the building materials chosen or the energy efficiency and bioclimatic criteria implemented in the construction, characterised the formal appearance of the majority of the buildings and facilities related to the Olympics.

But the challenge represented by climate change for cities is one of much greater magnitude and, in this sense, perhaps Japan, with its Olympic Games in 2020 in Tokyo, could take advantage of the organisation of the Olympic mega-event to promote these issues. The fact that some of the risks of climate change will be more evident in that territory than in others, grants coherence to the idea that the Olympic Games in Tokyo in 2020 could be the first 'climate-proof' mega-event in history. That would represent a forceful qualitative step towards considering the Olympic mega-event not as the management of the city's urban image but as something linked to current questions around the future that cities must contemplate in the years to come.

Without a doubt, the processes of *urbanalisation* are real and the current dependence of urban policies on the global requirements that the urban image represents is no less real. All of this creates patterns of inertia in terms of the ways in which we understand and guide urban mega-events, some of which have been explained here. At the same time, understanding that large-scale events can also be a catalyst for tackling new challenges in cities would allow us to guide future mega-events in terms of urban innovation and, above all, creativity. This way, advantage could be taken of the legacy of over a century of organising these types of urban events to provide content for a new urban agenda for cities in the 21st century.

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