Urban transformation from hosting the Olympic Games

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1. Introduction

The Olympic Games has become perhaps the most visible and spectacular public cultural event in modern society (Roche, 2000, p.3). The first modern Olympics held in Athens in 1896 attracted 311 athletes from 13 countries; the Sydney Games of 2000 involved 10,651 athletes from 199 countries, together with ticket sales of 6.7 million and a further 3.7 billion watching on television (Sydney Marketing Review, 2001). Given the global attention afforded to the event, a host city is unlikely to stage an Olympic Games without substantial urban development and investment. The host cities are required to provide new, or substantially refurbished, sports facilities to a world class standard. In addition, wider investment in tourism, transport and telecommunications infrastructure, hotel accommodation and environmental improvement is also often necessary to ensure the smooth running and success of the Games for both athletes and spectators. These wider investments also contribute to establishing a global image for the host city, which can encourage inward investment and tourism over the long-term. The Olympic Games are much more than a sporting event: they have evolved into a tool of urban renewal and a catalyst of substantial urban transformation. Nevertheless, the Olympics present major risks as well as opportunities for the effective transformation of host centres.

The aim of this paper is to review the role of the Olympic Games in changing and modernising the built environment of its hosts and to assess its role as a tool of urban regeneration. The paper is divided into three sections. The first outlines the procedures for the selection of Olympic host cities as essential background to the discussion. The second reviews the way in which past Olympic hosts have used the Games to stimulate infrastructural investment and identifies the particular circumstances likely to produce long-term legacies of value to the host. The third section identifies some of the potential dangers attached to hosting the Games. The conclusion focuses on the lessons learned and the main policy implications for infrastructural investment related to the Olympics.

At the outset, however, it is worth stressing that the measurement of an Olympic ‘legacy’ is, of course, a matter of debate and controversy. For example, caution has to be expressed about accepting all that is claimed for the Olympics with regard to legacies. Organising committees and public relations officials may be tempted to overstate the positive post-Games impacts.
and understate any negative consequences. Moreover, some of the investments might have occurred irrespective of the Olympics. Certainly, city planners may see the Games as an opportunity to fund and bring forward long-term plans that would otherwise remain in the ‘pending file’ for implementation later. In this way, the Olympics may be said to accelerate change rather than to initiate it. These points illustrate the classic ‘counter-factual’ problem in policy evaluation of not being able to prove what would or would not have happened if there had been no event. In addition, to some extent, the impact of the Olympics on host cities is dependent on the point of view of the assessor. The view of a local resident is likely to be very different from an urban planner, who might have a different perspective again from the politician.

2. Securing the right to stage the Olympics

The International Olympic Committee (IOC), as the body responsible for the conduct of Olympic sport and for the selection of host cities, specifies expected requirements for staging the event in a manual detailing the evaluation criteria to be addressed in the candidates cities’ bid dossiers. For the Summer Games of 2004, there were 19 themes covering competition sites, the Olympic Village, accommodation, transportation, technology, environmental management and the cultural programmes (IOC, 2003a). The selection of the host city is usually by a vote taken by members of the IOC, who have reports from the Evaluation Commission to assist their decisions. Host cities are monitored in the planning and preparations for the Games by an IOC Coordination Commission and can be assisted by the Transfer of Knowledge Programme (established in 2000) and by the Olympic Games Knowledge Services (established in February, 2002) (IOC, 2002a).

Given that so much has been at stake in the award of an Olympic Games, the selection process has often aroused considerable controversy. The intensity of competition has encouraged many candidate cities to spend lavishly on entertainment and gifts to impress the IOC members. Most candidate cities now expect to spend millions of dollars on their bids. Bribery and corruption have also appeared as less noble consequences of the intense competition, culminating in the bribery allegations surrounding the award of the Winter Games of 2002 to Salt Lake City. Modifications to the selection process have been made subsequently (IOC,
1999b). However, on a more positive note, it is important to recognise that even unsuccessful bids, by stimulating interest and demonstrating the opportunities possible, can activate urban regeneration (for example, Manchester’s unsuccessful Olympic bids eventually resulted in the hosting of the Commonwealth Games of 2002 and associated urban renewal, see Manchester City Council, 2003).

The main interests of the IOC in awarding the Olympic Games to a candidate city are to foster the goals of competitive sport, to provide a legacy of facilities that will stimulate athletic development; and also to heighten the profile of sport by providing better opportunities for training as well as sites for national and international competition (IOC, 1999a: Hall, 1992). These IOC objectives might, however, not totally coincide with the motivations of the host city for putting itself forward to stage the Games. Hosts are only able to justify the expenditure involved in preparing and staging an Olympic Games through the stimulus that the event can bring for economic development and urban regeneration – via job creation, investment in new infrastructure, environmental improvement and image creation/place marketing. The Olympics has an ability to capture the imagination and support of the general public and politicians alike, which can channel energy and finance into the project and ‘fast-track’ investment and planning to meet the Olympic deadline. The role of mega-events in stimulating such developments has become increasingly important in the urban economy as deindustrialisation and globalisation have forced planners to discard policies of development based on local production in favour of new strategies designed to compete on a global stage and to encourage consumption-based activities (Hiller, 2000; Ward, 1998).

The task of staging an Olympic Games should not be underestimated. As a result, whether London, for example, should bid for the Olympic Games of 2012 was a hotly contested issue (see British Olympic Association, 2003). The concerns expressed about the slow progress with the preparations for the Athens Olympic Games of 2004 by the IOC Coordination Commission also gives an indication of the scale and complexity of the task, as well as a warning of the potential pitfalls (IOC, 2002b; IOC, 2003b). Indeed, the extent to which host cities actively seek long-term infrastructural legacies from the Games can also change over the period from their initial bid. The promises and great expectations expressed during the preparation of the bid may be tempered by more realistic priorities during the actual preparations, which may then
be even forgotten or neglected during the post-Games era (Cashman, 2002). Securing long-term legacies from the Olympic Games might be better achieved by integrating post-Olympic planning and management at the bid stage and ensuring continuity in all subsequent stages. Legacy planning can, nevertheless, introduce contradictory aims in these other stages, such as conflicting with the priority to deliver the Games on time, within budget and with facilities that meet the specialist requirements of elite athletes.

3. Impact of Olympic-related infrastructure

The scale of the urban investment required to stage an Olympic Games has obviously increased as the number of sports and athletes, the global media interest and the level of commercial sponsorship has grown. Both the Summer and Winter Games have followed similar trajectories in their impact on the urban infrastructure of hosts (see Table 1) (Essex and Chalkley, 2002). Prior to 1960, both the Summer and Winter Games were relatively small-scale events involving only modest infrastructural investments, apart from the construction of sports venues themselves. Since 1960, the Games have involved large-scale urban transformations, which have acted as tools of regional development. These phases outlined in Table 1 are a useful guide to the main patterns and changes, although they are obviously a generalised model from which individual Games have sometimes deviated (Essex and Chalkley, 1998; Chalkley and Essex, 1999).

| Table 1. The changing infrastructural impact of the Summer and Winter Games, 1896-2002 |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| **Summer Olympic Games**       | **Winter Olympic Games**       |
| PHASE ONE: 1896-1904            | PHASE ONE: 1924-1932            |
| Small scale, poorly organised  | Minimal infrastructural        |
| and not necessarily involving  | transformation apart from      |
| any new development            | sports facilities.             |
| PHASE TWO: 1908-1932           | PHASE TWO: 1936-1960           |
| Small scale, better organised  | Emerging infrastructural       |
| and involving construction of  | demands, especially transportation. |
| purpose built sports facilities | PHASE THREE: 1964-1980         |
| PHASE THREE: 1936-1956         | Tool of regional development,  |
| Large scale, well organised    | especially transportation and  |
| and involving construction of  | Olympic Villages.              |
| purpose built sport facilities  |                                 |
| with some impact on urban     |                                 |
| infrastructure                |                                 |
Some cities have utilised the Olympics as a springboard to wider urban development much more energetically than others. A number of possible explanations are possible. The needs and circumstances of individual hosts obviously vary. Substantial investment has been required in some host cities to raise public health and environmental standards to levels that would be acceptable to international visitors and the world’s media. Economic factors in both the local and global contexts have also played a key role in determining levels of infrastructural investment. The prevailing national and local attitudes to public expenditure and the role of the state can affect the level of provision. Games more dependent on the commercial priorities of the private sector, such as those organised in America since the 1980s, have less wide-ranging impacts on the urban infrastructure. Political motivations can sometimes be reflected in the scale of investment in new facilities for the Olympics. For example, the scale of investment for the Berlin Games of 1936 owed much to the ideology of the Third Reich and to Hitler’s determination to use the Games as a showcase for National Socialism. Barcelona’s preparations were also partly motivated by a desire to express the achievements of Catalonia.

Three sets of Olympic Games may be identified to illustrate the extent to which host cities have used the event to trigger infrastructural improvements. First, some cities, depending on the financial and political circumstances and opportunities available to them locally, have sought to minimise both the scale of transformations and expenditure on preparations for the event. The very early Olympic Games, for example, were relatively low impact events, although some new and refurbished venues were created for the Athens Games of 1896. Post-war austerity measures ensured that the London Games of 1948 utilised existing facilities, while poor economic conditions and social concerns resulted in only modest levels of investment for the Mexico Games of 1968. More significantly, some recent Games have involved comparatively modest investment in urban infrastructure. The Los Angeles Games of 1984 is most notable in this respect as, with no other bidding cities and local opposition to the expense and expected disruption from the event, the organisers were allowed to operate as a totally private-sector funded venture mainly using existing facilities (including the Olympic

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<td>Large scale, well organised and involving construction of purpose built sports facilities with significant impacts on urban infrastructure</td>
<td>Large-scale urban transformations, including multiple Olympic Villages.</td>
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Source: Chalkley and Essex (1999); Essex and Chalkley (in preparation).
Stadium of 1932 and University halls of residence). Paradoxically, despite bringing little change to the urban infrastructure, the Los Angeles Games of 1984 were a substantial commercial success, which then ignited the subsequent inter-urban competition between bid cities to stage the event.

Attempts by other cities to copy the model of Los Angeles have not always proved successful. The Atlanta Games of 1996, for example, have been cited as a failure of American private-public sector partnerships, because of the lack of wider investment in the city’s infrastructure, beyond the sports venues. As a result, traffic congestion, administrative problems, security breaches and over-commercialisation meant that the city did not receive favourable media coverage. The President of the IOC was only prepared to pronounce the Games in Atlanta as a qualified success rather than as the customary ‘best Games ever’. He is reported to have told a German newspaper that he would not again support a largely privately-funded Olympics, with such prominent business sponsorship.

A second group of Games have produced infrastructural investments focused on substantial new sports facilities but with only modest changes to the city’s wider environment and infrastructure. Games in this category are mainly those in the period from the 1910s to the late 1950s. The main stadium for the London Games of 1908 had attempted to accommodate too many kinds of sports. Subsequently, specialist facilities for different sports were built either located around a city (as in Stockholm in 1912) or on one site (as in Berlin in 1936). The athletics stadium became the ceremonial and symbolic focus for each Olympic Games. Other related infrastructure, such as the Olympic Village, became increasingly substantial investments as the event grew in size and status.

A third set of Olympic impacts relate to the stimulation of much wider transformations in the urban environment. Typically, these implications have been more keenly felt since 1960 as the scale of the event has increased, but they also coincide with the emergence of the event’s role as a catalyst of urban policy and change, which has intensified since the mid-1980s. The range of public infrastructure required to stage an Olympic Games is outlined in the next section.
4. Types of Olympic-related infrastructure

The scale of the Olympic event now requires a substantial amount of land simply to provide the sports facilities and related infrastructure required to stage the event. For most host cities, available sites are usually spread across a wide area, perhaps even beyond the urban boundary itself. In these circumstances, an effective transportation infrastructure is essential to the success of the Games. For other host cities, one main site containing the majority of sports venues and the Olympic Village can be developed as an Olympic Park. In these cases, such sites often consist of previously derelict or contaminated land, and the Olympics provide the means and justification for renewal and regeneration. Olympic Games which have been hosted on single sites usually operate very effectively, largely because the venues are within walking distance of each other and so reduce the transportation problems (providing access to the site is efficient). With innovative architecture and design, the Olympic-related infrastructure can transform the urban spaces of host cities.

4.1 Sports facilities

A number of hosts have taken the Olympics as an opportunity to redevelop one particular site within their city by focusing the development of sports facilities. The award of the Games to Munich for the Summer Olympics of 1972 represented an opportunity to fast-track redevelopment of a 280 ha derelict site within five years that had originally been scheduled for rejuvenation over a 20 year period. Similarly, the main Olympic site for the Montreal Games of 1976 (Maisonneuve Park) focused the development of sports facilities and the Olympic Village in one place and enabled a long-standing plan to be implemented more quickly than would have otherwise been the case. The Sydney Games of 2000 were also mainly concentrated on a 760 ha site at Homebush Bay. The redevelopment of this site, badly scarred by a range of noxious land uses and contaminated land, had originally been planned as a centre for sporting, exhibition and business uses to complement existing facilities on adjacent sites. The decision to pursue the Olympic bid in 1991 reinforced and accelerated the area’s renewal.

The Barcelona Games is regarded as one of the most successful Olympics ever. The transformations made in the city for the Olympics have become regarded as a model for other cities wishing to initiate large-scale revitalisation schemes. The Olympic facilities were constructed at three main locations in the city. At the first location, Montjuïc, existing facilities,
such as the main stadium, were refurbished. The second location, Vall d’Hebron, was redeveloped with new sports facilities. The third and most striking and successful transformation occurred at Parc de Mar, where an area of declining industries became the Olympic Village and public space. The development created a continuation of the Eixample district and opened up the city to a 5.2 km stretch of coastline. This area represents one of the main symbols of Barcelona’s Olympic transformation.

The sporting facilities required to stage a Winter Olympics present slightly different challenges. While facilities such as ski slopes and ice sports centres can have a tourist and recreational function in the post-Olympic period, other facilities such as ski jumps and the bobsleigh/luge track have limited usage outside international competitions. Investment in such facilities requires careful justification or there is a risk of creating a legacy that is expensive to maintain. For example, the ski jump built for the Grenoble Games of 1968 is now derelict because it proved to be poorly sited and too expensive to operate.

4.2. Transport

An event as large as the Olympic Games usually necessitates substantial investment in the transport infrastructure. In order to ensure that the movement of athletes, spectators and officials during the event is efficient, and so presents the best possible impression of the host city to its visitors, enlarged airport capacity, new roads and better public transport systems can be an essential part of the Olympic preparations. Some of the Olympic Games in Asia have involved substantial levels of transport investment. The largest project related to the Tokyo Games of 1964 was the construction of 22 new highways and two new underground railway lines, which enabled the city to cope with the short-term demands of the event, as well as the long-term prospects related to local population and traffic growth. Preparations for the Seoul Summer Games of 1988 involved the construction of three subway lines, 47 extensions to bus routes and an enlarged international airport. Athens is investing heavily in its transport infrastructure for the Summer Games of 2004, largely because public investment in the public transport network has failed to keep pace with recent rapid urbanisation. Over 210 km of ring roads and highways, 25 km of a new light railway and two new underground lines are being constructed or improved (Athens Olympic Organising Committee, 2003).
Transport is also an essential aspect of the organisation of the Winter Games. With sports venues often in isolated locations, and accommodation dispersed over a large (often rural) area, a reliable transport infrastructure is needed to move thousands of people sometimes in poor weather conditions. Road improvements can also be of long-term economic advantage to host centres. A total of 20 per cent of the total investment in the Grenoble Games of 1968 was on road infrastructure, and was designed to decentralise the region and facilitate economic growth. The investment acted as a catalyst for the wider regional economy and also transformed the town into a conference and university centre. Transport investment for the Sapporo Winter Olympics in 1972 included extensions to two airports, improvements to the main railway station, 41 new or improved roads (213 km) and the construction of a rapid transit system (45 km).

The anticipation of traffic congestion in the Olympic host city for the duration of the Games often leads to the introduction of innovative traffic control measures. During the Seoul Games of 1988, the use of private vehicles was restricted. Locals were only allowed to drive their car every other day according to even and odd plate numbers. For the Winter Games in Oslo in 1952, special lanes for athletes were introduced, while in Nagano in 1998, the general public were asked not to drive to work or school and companies were asked to close or stagger their start times in order to avoid rush hour congestion. These types of restrictions, however, also illustrate the disruptions that the Olympic Games can cause for the daily routine of the citizens of the host city.

4.3. Accommodation

In contrast to the stimuli that the Olympics brings to most other forms of development, the incentive for investment in hotel construction, refurbishment or extension is much more limited. As the Games are over within three weeks, there is only a limited incentive for new investment in accommodation. Hoteliers and developers have to be mindful of the ‘boom and bust’ dangers inherent in increasing bed spaces to meet expected increased demand during the event. In fact, evidence has shown that, rather than substantially enhancing tourism, the Olympics appears to shift visitor volumes in time and space, often in the short-term. Some tourists will decide not visit a host city during the event, while the focus on a host can reduce visitor volumes in neighbouring areas. Any increases in tourist numbers are usually short-lived
(McKay and Plumb, 2001). In these conditions, the viability of new hotel investment is questionable. The realisation of these constraints on new accommodation development presents a serious challenge to host cities facing at least a temporary increase in demand for the duration of the event. A common solution is usually in the form of home-stay letting, bed and breakfast or even cruise liners that can be moored locally.

Accommodation of the athletes is normally in an Olympic Village, often located close to the sports venues. In order to accommodate the thousands of athletes and associated personnel, this development is substantial and therefore has to be planned for a specific post-Olympic use. In most cases, Olympic Villages become residential centres for local people or halls of residences for a local university or college. For example, the Olympic Village for the Helsinki Games of 1952 was designed from the outset as a permanent residential quarter after the Games. Similarly, the Olympic Village for the Munich Games of 1972, which accommodated 10,000 athletes during the event, housed middle and lower income families afterwards. Sydney’s Olympic Village, also now a residential area, was designed as a model of eco-sensitive construction, incorporating solar power, water recycling and passive heating and cooling.

Not all hosts of the Winter Olympics, however, have the capacity to digest and absorb the development of an Olympic Village into their urban fabric. In particular, the Winter Games before 1960 utilised existing accommodation because of the fears related to viability. Even more recent Games, such as those in 1992 and 1994, were forced to utilise refurbished and temporary accommodation respectively in order to ensure long-term viability. The Winter Games of 1992 also raised a question about the value of a single Olympic Village. Concerns about the safe transportation of athletes in poor weather led to seven other small ‘satellite’ Olympic Villages being established in existing hotel accommodation closer to the event sites (Chappelelet, 1997).

4.4. Other physical urban improvements

The Olympics can also create a range of other benefits for the urban environment of host cities, depending upon their circumstances and general condition. The event is often a stimulus to improving infrastructural standards to a level, or ‘benchmark’, appropriate for international visitors. In Tokyo, the Olympic preparations included improvements to the water supply
system, three sewage disposal plants, and higher public health standards for refuse collection, street cleaning, public toilets and food hygiene. In Seoul, too, new programmes were introduced for dealing with waste management, water quality and air pollution. Investment in telecommunications infrastructure in Barcelona, Atlanta and Sydney placed all three cities in a much better position to compete on the global cities network. The prominence of sustainable development in the Lillehammer and Sydney Games has heightened awareness of environmental considerations in urban development and planning.

General programmes of landscape and environmental improvement throughout the urban area can help to present a memorable image of the city for its visitors. Even in Atlanta, which did not invest heavily in public-sector works, the Centennial Olympic Park was provided, consisting of landscaped gardens, trees, paths and foundations. Investment in cultural infrastructure, such as museums and art galleries, can also be forthcoming, especially to support the Olympic Cultural Program which runs parallel to the main sporting events (see García, 2002). Together with the stadia as venues for future sporting events, all of these additional developments can facilitate the long-term development of tourism, as well as creating an attractive urban environment for residents and future inward business investment. A paper on optimising the tourism benefits of the Olympics has been written by Chalip (2002).

4.5. New forms of urban management and organisation

Less obvious to the local resident or visitor, but of equal significance in the longer term, is the effect that the Olympic Games can have on the management and organisation of the urban area. In order that cities might exploit the full potential of hosting the Olympics, traditional bureaucratic and hierarchical forms of decision-making are often considered inappropriate. Instead, new approaches have been demanded, characterised by speed, flexibility, initiative, networking, partnership and media coverage (Cochrane, Peck and Tickell, 1996). Such approaches can drive proposed developments through normal procedures to meet deadlines and so can help to breath new life into urban areas. They are, of course, not without their risks and negative consequences, as will be outlined in the next section.
5. Potential infrastructural dangers of staging the Olympics

The decision to bid for the Games is usually made by the urban political leadership and/or other urban elite groups, such as business groups, on the basis that the event is desirable and beneficial. Although the IOC ask for evidence of support from the local communities in the bid documents, the main decision-making concerning the bid and developments can often be perceived as undemocratic and uncritical. Economic, social and environmental pre-evaluations of the event may be incomplete and biased and development can be fast-tracked without sufficient public discussion. Opposition to the Olympic proposals and bid from local groups may be deliberately silenced or even mobilised into active expressions of support and consensus (Boyle, 1997). In the words of David Harvey (1989), cities become infatuated with monumentality and world-class status, which gives the illusion of consensus. In reality, the actual direct benefits experienced by a citizen of a host city may be relatively negligible and, in some cases, these can be extra costs and new intra-urban rivalries. Some sections of the community can become ‘losers’ in the Olympic boom.

There are a number of well-documented examples of the detrimental impacts of staging the Olympic Games albeit mainly from the recent past. Evidence becomes more difficult to find as Olympic history is traced back, which might relate to the smaller-scale impacts of the early Games or the limited survival of relevant historical records (this topic would represent an interesting area for future research inquiry). There are a number of high profile groups, which have campaigned against recent Olympic bids and awards (eg. Helsinki 2006 Anti-Olympic Committee, antiolympai.com; Sydney 2000 People Ingeniously Subverting the Sydney Olympics Farce, pissoff@cat.org.au; Toronto 2008 and Vancouver 2010, Bread not Circuses, www.breadnotcircuses.org; Turin 2006 Nolymics! nolimpiadi8m.com). The common areas of concern over Olympic-related infrastructure usually relate to the costs and impacts on local communities. Expenditure on the Olympic-related infrastructure can be extravagant in order to ensure that the event is a success. Organisers have to be sure that the execution of the event is of the highest standard, triggers the city’s consumption development and produces a positive image (Andranovich, et al., 2001). These priorities can sometimes be at the expense of the interests of local communities, as illustrated below:
a) Local government investment can be diverted from social services and education in order to pay for Olympic-related infrastructure. In order to avoid debt from the construction of Olympic facilities for the Sydney Games of 2000, the New South Wales Government introduced cutbacks in a range of public services (Whitson and Macintosh, 1996, p.291). The cost of the Mexico Games of 1968 were contested by some citizens who questioned whether the money might not have been better spent on alleviating the city’s poverty and social problems. Violent protests were staged, in which force by police and army units was used to quell the opposition. No less than 250 students were killed.

b) Increased local taxes to pay for Olympic-related infrastructure can be a central issue. The most publicised Olympic debt is Montreal's $1.5 billion debt from the Summer Games of 1976. A combination of factors, including economic recession, construction problems, labour disputes and associated costs, conspired to accentuate the financial burden of staging the Games and the level of long-term indebtedness. Subsequent Games have been much more cost-conscious, although increased sponsorship and revenue from television rights have helped to subsidise expenditure. The long-term economic and social benefits and costs are often not incorporated into these calculations, although high levels of public subsidy are, in these cases, being used to subsidise private accumulation (Whitson and Macintosh, 1996, p.283). Some fundamental lessons on the economic dimensions of the Olympic Games have been highlighted by Preuss (2002).

c) Disruption and disturbance of existing communities by Olympic-related development can be a significant problem. Inner city renewal induced by the Olympics can entail evictions or displacement of existing working class populations/industrial functions and their replacement through gentrification by middle class residents and consumers (Hiller, 2000, p.440). Displaced residents may suffer dislocation from workplaces and social networks, while remaining residents may experience deprivation and exclusion in an area whose services and facilities now cater for a different social group (Whitson and Macintosh, 1996, p.290). However, these impacts appear to be highly variable. Rapid increases in house prices and rentals were recorded in Seoul and Barcelona, but minimal change was experienced in Atlanta and Sydney (McKay and Plumb, 2001).
Environmental issues are another area of concern. Despite the adoption of the principles of sustainable development into the Olympic Charter, the Games can produce negative environmental impacts. The reassignment of the Winter Olympics of 1976 from Denver to Innsbruck (the only time in Olympic history that this circumstance has occurred) was a consequence of local opposition in Colorado to the rising cost of the event and the perceived threats to the local environment.

The Olympics also raises global equity issues. The geography of Olympic hosts cities is predominantly concentrated in Europe, North America and the Pacific Rim, which have the financial resources to provide the required infrastructure. It has been suggested that the Summer Games cost approximately US$ 2 billion (with a further US$ 1 billion plus in government expenditure), while the Winter Games cost approximately US$ 1 billion (with a further US$ 700 million plus in government expenditure) (IOC, 2002c). There are serious doubts as to whether urban centres in regions of the less developed world would be able to stage the event on the required scale, unless substantial changes are implemented.

The IOC Olympic Games Study Commission (IOC, 2002c) has recently recognised the need to review the scale of the event:

“The Games have reached a critical size which may put their future success at risk if the size continues to increase. Steps must be undertaken and serious consideration given to effectively manage future growth, while at the same time preserving the attractiveness of the Games. If unchecked, the current growth of the Games could discourage many cities from bidding to host the Games”

(IOC, 2002c, p.16).

The final report of this Commission was submitted at the 115th IOC Session in July 2003. Its main recommendation was to develop a Games ‘template’ which would specify the requirements for staging the event. In doing so, these expectations would also enable extravagant provision to be more easily identified. Key principles enshrined within the Commission’s report were to encourage the development of shared venues and facilities; to maximise temporary installations and only permit permanent facilities if a positive post-Games
legacy could be demonstrated; to reduce the quantity of reserved seating for dignitaries; to promote the transfer of knowledge between host cities; and to optimise government and host city involvement throughout the planning process. The IOC, and the Evaluation Commissions in particular, have a duty of responsibility to apply these guidelines in their selection and monitoring of host cities in the future (IOC, 2003c). Possible reductions in the expectations, number of sports and level of investments for future Games may increase the chances of less developed nations being able to afford to stage the event. The IOC would have to be convinced that the facilities for the athletes would be good enough to allow them to achieve their best performance(s) and that security measures would not be compromised. However, it is significant that the Commission highlights that the IOC, through its efforts to make the Games leaner and more manageable, should ensure that the Olympic Games leave a positive legacy for the host city and its citizens.

6. Conclusions

While it is not legitimate to conceptualise an ‘Olympic City’ as a distinct urban genre, the infrastructural ‘footprint’ of staging the Olympic Games can be substantial. Potential urban transformations relate not simply to the sporting venues, but to transport, hotel accommodation, urban services, telecommunications and general environmental improvement. To date, the most successful Games, from an infrastructural perspective, have been those that have followed a clear plan that has not necessarily depended exclusively upon securing the Olympic event for implementation. The Olympic legacy is most effective and pronounced where it goes with the grain of wider urban policies and developments. The ‘Olympic effect’ can be maximised if the main venues are concentrated on one site. Not only does this strategy focus investment, renewal and attention in a defined area, but it can also reduce potential transportation problems for both athletes and spectators during the event. Events that have been able to call on public expenditure, rather than just depending upon private sector investment, have often produced more substantial and impressive effects.

The requirements of an Olympic infrastructure are, of course, imposed on local urban planners by external organisations, such as the IOC and International Sports Federations. The potential for negative as well as positive effects is therefore significant. While many host cities have
been transformed by the event and gained a new global status, others have acquired ‘white elephants’ and have received less favourable publicity. Olympic-related infrastructure can have positive outcomes for local populations, but can equally produce negative consequences. This issue presents something of a dilemma for the organisers. On the one hand, they obviously have to produce an Olympic Games on time and within budget yet, on the other hand, avoid adverse publicity from local groups which might be detrimental to the city’s image and reputation. These conflicts are recognised by the IOC. The recommendations of the Olympic Study Commission in July, 2003, emphasise that maximising the long-term legacy through control over the size and cost of the Games. A new phase in the history of Olympic-related development may therefore be heralded in the near future. From the Olympic Games of 2012 onwards, the issues of infrastructure and legacy highlighted in this paper may well achieve a still greater significance and prominence.
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de Barcelona
<http://olympicstudies.uab.es/lectures/web/pdf/garcia.pdf>


IOC (2003a) Evaluation Commission Reports, Lausanne: IOC.


Further reading

Barcelona 1992 Official Report
http://www.aafia.org/6oic/report_frmst.htm

Official Report of the XXVII Olympiad

Related web sites

IOC Olympic Games Study Commission
http://www.olympic.org/uk/organisation/commissions/games_study/index_uk.asp

IOC Olympic Games Coordination Commission
http://www.olympic.org/uk/organisation/commissions/ogcc/index_uk.asp

Manchester 2002 Commonwealth Games
http://213.131.178.162/home/

Seoul 1988 Olympic Games
Urban transformation from hosting the Olympic Games

The infrastructural requirements of staging an Olympic Games are substantial. The event demands investment in world class sporting venues as well as in urban transport, telecommunications, accommodation and environmental improvements. The Olympic Games are much more than a sporting event: they have evolved into a tool of urban renewal and a catalyst of urban transformation. The aim of this paper is to review the role of the Olympic Games in changing and modernising the built environment of its host cities and to assess its role as a tool of urban regeneration. The paper is divided into three sections. The first outlines the procedures for the selection of Olympic host cities as essential background to the discussion. The second evaluates the way in which past Olympic hosts have used the Games to stimulate infrastructural investment, and considers also the legacy likely to be created by each type of infrastructure. The third section highlights some of the potential dangers that have been experienced by past hosts. The conclusion focuses on the lessons learned and the main policy implications for infrastructural investment related to the Olympic Games.

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