



Policy and Governance in Europe Research Group

Research Themes

The Olympic Games: catalyst of urban change

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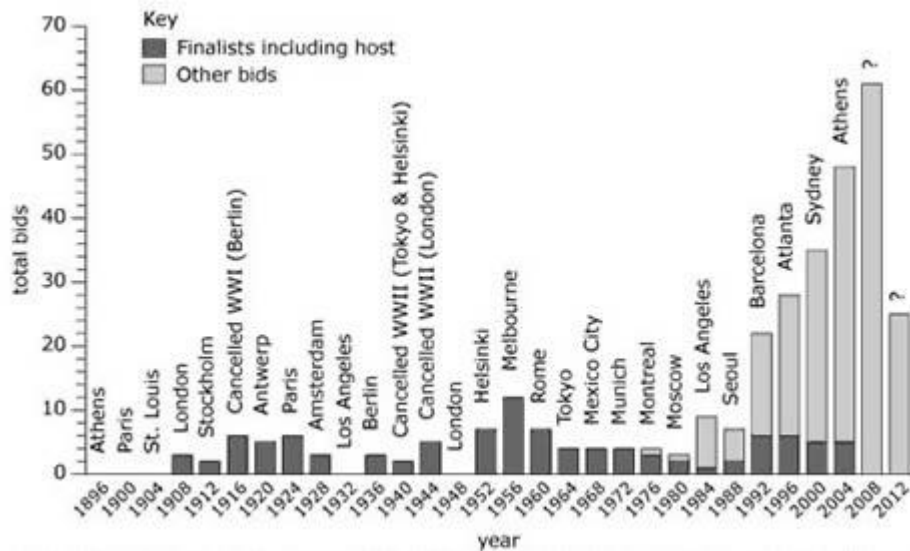
Introduction

Mega-events, such as the Olympic Games, have emerged as a significant feature of de-industrialised, post-modern societies in which the promotion of 'urban spectacles' has become a key element of urban and economic policy (Harvey, 1989). The Olympic Games have come to represent a major opportunity for economic regeneration, infrastructural investment and environmental improvement, as well as a means of achieving international prominence and national prestige through 'place marketing'. Consequently, the Olympics are perceived by many urban and political leaderships as a highly desirable event to host and have therefore emerged as a significant focus of global inter-urban competition and policy. This research has had three aims:

- To assess the evolution of global inter-urban competition to stage the Olympic Games;
- To examine the geographical distribution of both the bidding cities and those that have been selected as host cities; and
- To review the effect of the Games on the built environment of the various cities which have acted as hosts in the modern Olympic period.

Inter-urban competition to stage the Olympics

The selection of host cities to stage the Olympic Games has evolved as the event has grown in stature and status. Until 1992, the number of bidding cities remained generally low. The lack of interest in staging the Games between 1960 and 1984 was felt to be an indication that the Olympics were becoming too large and expensive for hosts as well as presenting particular problems related to political interference and terrorism. The commercial success of the Los Angeles Olympics of 1984 and the urban transformations associated with the Barcelona Games of 1992 have renewed interest in the event.



The number of bids to stage the Summer Olympic Games, 1896-2012: The remarkable growth in the number of candidates is the clearest possible evidence that cities now perceive major benefits to be derived from the Games, related in part to the globalisation of television coverage.

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The Geography of Olympic Hosts

Host cities have been heavily concentrated in Europe, and to a lesser extent, in North America and Asia. This distribution reflects levels of economic development, as well as the extent of involvement in world athletics and the event's European origin. No Games have yet been hosted in Africa or South America. However, given the increased scale of the Olympics and their major infrastructural requirements (new stadia, facilities, transport, and hotels), there may be doubts about how many cities in these continents would be able to accommodate a modern Olympics. An analysis of bids to host the Olympics reveals geographical patterns broadly similar to those for the cities actually selected. America and Europe have submitted the most bids, while those from Asia, Africa and South America are of a considerably lower magnitude. It might be argued that unless the distribution of host cities becomes more equitable, the value of the Olympics as a genuinely global event will be diminished.



The Olympic Stadium used to stage the Montreal Games of 1976. The Olympic facilities at Maisonneuve Park were designed ambitiously by French architect, Roger Taillibert. Technical and construction problems, related to an unstable site and the use of new construction materials and techniques, added to the problems experienced in staging this event. The city incurred a debt of \$1.5 billion



The Sydney International Aquatic Centre, opened in October, 1994, provides a range of facilities for the Olympic swimming events at Homebush Bay. The facilities include the main competition pool, training pools, leisure pools, sauna and steam rooms, a gymnasium and medical services. The competition hall has a ten lane main pool and a diving area. These facilities represent a considerable Olympic legacy for the people of Sydney.

The Olympics as a Catalyst of Urban Change

The impact of each Olympic Games on the host city's facilities, environment and infrastructure can be presented historically in four phases. The early Games were staged as an adjunct to World Exhibitions or Fairs and so were essentially side-shows, lacking real international interest or urban impact. Today, the award of the Olympics usually heralds major new developments and enables existing plans to be 'fast-tracked' through the planning and development stages much sooner than would have otherwise been the case. The legacy from the considerable investment in both sporting facilities and supporting infrastructure required for the Games can, of course, be both positive and negative for the hosts. The Games may be an opportunity for economic and environmental regeneration, but may also tend to overshadow or marginalise the needs of local people. Organised local public opposition groups, such as 'Bread not Circuses' in Toronto and the 'Anti-Olympic Committee' in Helsinki, have been formed to oppose the bidding campaigns of those cities for the Olympic Games.

As a response to the concerns about the growing scale of the Olympics, the IOC's Olympic Study Commission in July, 2003 has recommended a number of controls to ensure that legacy is a priority in the staging of future Games. Legacy needs to be integrated and given equal weighting through all stages of Olympic planning. A new phase in the history of Olympic-related development may therefore be heralded. The issues of infrastructure and legacy will be implemented fully from the London Olympic Games of 2012.

Summer Olympic Games	Winter Olympic Games
PHASE ONE: 1896-1904 Small scale, poorly organised and not necessarily involving any new development.	PHASE ONE: 1924-1932 Minimal infrastructural transformation apart from sports facilities.
PHASE TWO: 1908-1932 Small scale, better organised and involving construction of purpose built sports facilities.	PHASE TWO: 1936-1960 Emerging infrastructural demands, especially transportation.
PHASE THREE: 1936-1956 Large scale, well organised and involving construction of purpose built sport facilities with some impact on urban infrastructure.	PHASE THREE: 1964-1980 Tool of regional development, especially transportation and Olympic Villages.
PHASE FOUR: 1960-2004 Large scale, well organised and involving construction of purpose built sports facilities with significant impacts on urban infrastructure.	PHASE FOUR: 1984-2006 Large-scale urban transformations, including multiple Olympic Villages.

The changing infrastructural impact of the Summer and Winter Games, 1896-2002
SOURCE: Chalkley and Essex (1999); Essex and Chalkley (2004).

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