

Olympic Villages after the Games

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Without shadow of a doubt I think we could say that the Olympic Games are the biggest sporting event held in the world. That's why the cities hosting them enjoy a moment of exceptional glory. Something that is unique, unforgettable and hard to compare with other major celebrations or events that have been held throughout the history of the Games.

It is true to say that there are particular representative edifices whose aim is to immortalise an ephemeral event - such as a conquest or commemoration - in every city throughout the world. Such elements are a reflection of a glorious past. These buildings, full of monumental character and symbology, remain with us like a static defiance to city change, like loyal witnesses of the times and degree of development.

Likewise, there doesn't appear to be any doubt about the ephemeral character of the Games: two weeks in the history of a city obviously constitute a strictly on-off event. On the other hand, the very logic of the Olympic Movement and its principle of universality makes it almost impossible for the Games to be held again in the same city; only Paris, London and Los Angeles have held the Olympic on two occasions with intervals of 24, 40 and 52 years between them, respectively. During that period of time the cities underwent processes of major transformation, and that fact allows us to assert the idea that, in the cases of the cities mentioned, they were indeed different ones.

In this presentation I do not want to refer to the symbolic elements left behind after the Games. Instead, I am going to talk to you about the set of sports and residential facilities which have to be digested by the city itself and incorporated into "everyday" life as soon as the Closing Ceremony is over. Most of the sports buildings required for the organisation of the Olympic Games and the residential facilities necessary to accommodate the athletes, the press or members of the Olympic Family cannot simply be considered from the point of view of their use during the Games. On the contrary, they have to be considered as new elements in need of integration into the city.

The huge cost of the urban "assets" required nowadays to cope with the organisation of the Games demands an in-depth initial study of their future profitability. There's no point in building sports facilities or residential estates for the fortnight of the Games if their post-Olympic use is not defined from the very outset.

I would like to end this introduction by saying that there is no "after" for Olympic Villages without a well-defined "before". This means good planning. Olympic Village recycling cannot be left to chance right up to the day of the Games' closure. Similarly, it doesn't make any sense to build a stadium without having a project for its subsequent use beforehand. It is on the basis of this reasoning, then, that I would like to approach the following thoughts about the "before" of Olympic Villages and thus avoid, at all costs, the fatalist vision of those who consider the Games' heritage to be an additional, hard-to-solve urban problem.

The Dimension of the Games

Before dealing with the specific town-planning problems posed by building an Olympic Village, the demands for urban land consumption imposed by the organisation of the Games should be examined. The following tables give a summary of the amount of land required for the facilities contained in the manual drawn up by the IOC for

candidate cities. The figures arrived at are, approximately, the minimum ones necessary for the construction of each facility shown.

<i>Outdoor Competition Facilities</i>		
Type	No. of units	Overall estimated surface area
Athletics	1	8 Ha.
Baseball		
- Main	1	5 Ha.
- Subsidiary	1	4 Ha.
Velodrome	1	4 Ha.
Equestrian sports centre	1	20 Ha.
Football		
- Main	1	8 Ha.
- Subsidiary	4 (x 3 Ha.)	12 Ha.
Hockey	1	10 Ha.
Softball	1	3 Ha.
Tennis	1	4 Ha.
Beach volleyball	1	3 Ha.
Total	14	81 Ha.
<i>Indoor Competition Facilities</i>		
Type	No. of Units	Overall estimated surface area
Small halls	6 (x 1.5 Ha.)	9 Ha.
Medium halls	5 (x 3 Ha.)	15 Ha.
Large halls	2 (x 4 Ha.)	8 Ha.
Total		32 Ha.
<i>Special Competition Facilities</i>		
Type	No. of units	Overall estimated surface area
Rowing and canoeing stadium	1	75 Ha.
Slalom canal	1	15 Ha.
Complete competition centre	1	300 Ha.
Swimming pool complex	1 or 2	5 Ha. (total)
Shooting centre	1	30 Ha.
Archery complex	1	5 Ha.
Olympic port	1	15 Ha.
Total	6 or 7	445 Ha.

Training Facilities		
Type	No. of Units	Overall estimated surface area
Various	80	20 Ha.
Total		20 Ha.

Accommodation Facilities			
Type	Capacity	Residential ceiling	Surface area
Olympic Village	15,750 p.	300,000 m ²	60 Ha. (min.)
Family Town	5,000 p.	100,000 m ²	5 Ha.
Referees and judges, observers Media Village	7,000 p.	140,000 m ²	10 Ha.
Youth Camp	600 p.	10,000 m ²	7 Ha.
Total	28,350 p.	560,000 m²	82 Ha.

Service Facilities		
Type	Built ceiling	Surface area
IBC	50,000 m ²	3 Ha.
MPC	40,000 m ²	2 Ha.
OCOG headquarters	40,000 m ²	2 Ha.
Other service centres (Security centres, telecommunications, logistics, etc.)	50,000 m ²	2 Ha.
Total	180,000 m²	11 Ha.

Surface Area Summary	
Type	Land required
Outdoor Competition facilities	81 Ha.
Indoor competition facilities	32 Ha.
Special competition facilities	445 Ha.
Training facilities	20 Ha.
Accommodation facilities	82 Ha.
Service facilities	11 Ha.
Total	671 Ha.

The totals appearing in the tables above do not include surrounding areas or park areas which usually form part of these types of facility. And that's why the total area required to host the Games could be estimated at around 1,000Ha. As we can see, the residential areas are just a small fraction of the total problem: the

set of Villages represents about 12% of the total land consumption required by the Games. For this reason, Olympic Village town planning cannot be done in isolation or separately from general Games' planning. In other words, the problem is not posed by the 80Ha occupied by the Villages. The problem is posed by the 1,000Ha. required for the Games in general. And how many cities are there which can successfully cope with such demands?

The Dimension of Olympic Cities

Let's take a look at the cities which have hosted the Games since 1960, the year when television broadcasting started its vertiginous process of media growth. This growth was also accompanied by the increase in the qualitative and quantitative demands placed on the organisers by the Games themselves.

<i>Size of Olympic Villages</i>		
Year	City	Population
1960	Rome	3,180,000
1964	Tokyo	11,829,000
1968	Mexico City	19,400,000
1972	Munich	2,316,000
1976	Montreal	2,950,000
1980	Moscow	13,200,000
1984	Los Angeles	11,500,000
1988	Seoul	15,800,000
1992	Barcelona	3,975,000
1996	Atlanta	2,500,000
2000	Sydney	3,610,000

We can see that none of the cities selected to host the Olympic Games in the last 40 years has under 2.5 million inhabitants, except for Munich which only has 2.3 million. An extremely important conclusion can be drawn immediately from this fact: the lower population threshold for a city to be able to digest and assimilate the impact of the Olympic Games is around the mentioned figure of 2.5 million. Below that threshold, it seems that history is trying to tell us something about the financial problems that may derive from a decision that is not well thought out and also about the difficulties which are strictly town planning-related, like finding enough room in the city to locate the 1,000Ha. that we spoke of earlier.

The quoted population sizes refer to the metropolitan area or urban continuum and not the strictly administrative boundaries of the city. Continuing along the same lines of reasoning, just as there is a population threshold for building a general hospital or an opera house, it seems reasonable to situate the minimum threshold for viable Olympic Games at around 2,000,000 inhabitants. In smaller cities it appears to be hard to prevent the public and private sector efforts required to be build an Olympic Village - and a complex set of sports facilities - from having negative effects. After a perfectly feasible organisational success of the Games, the city has to wake up to bills

that are very hard to meet. This was the case, for example, of Montreal and Munich to some extent. Both cities are the smallest in population size in the previous list. Unlike these, however, cities like Seoul, Moscow, Mexico and Tokyo did not have any problems whatsoever selling and using the residences built there.

To counter these arguments somewhat, we could say that it is very unlikely for the Olympic Games to be held in just one place. So, the loads as well as the benefits are shared between several cities. The IOC accepts this with regard to certain sports facilities requiring specific venues like yachting, canoeing or Olympic shooting, but this appears to be far from being a regional vision of the Games. If that happens one day, the urban spirit, the "civitas" which currently bodes well for the Olympics, will have to be substantially modified: neither countries nor regions organise the Olympic Games according to the Olympic Charter, whereas cities indeed do.

Olympic Villages and the City

The positive or negative effect that building a residential complex of around 3,000 housing units doesn't solely depend on the features of the Olympic Village itself, e.g. location, architectural style, quality standards and accessibility: it mainly depends on the urban strategy chosen by the city in the overall planning of the Games. Barcelona Olympic Village, for example, should not be analysed in an isolated or independent way. It should, however, be considered as one of the four large urban pieces that have contributed to extensive renovation of the city. The same residential complex with the same features located, for example, in an area outside the city would have had a totally different impact.

Every edition of the Games is very different from the other, mainly because no two cities are alike, and no two cities define their territorial strategies in the same way. An Olympic Village model or type will be successful in a specific urban context. But, it would probably be a failure if it were applied somewhere else. The essential idea is that both the Games' territorial implantation model and the type of residential operation chosen for the Villages should be coherent with the urban strategy and model of the city and democratically accepted by its inhabitants. Even though, as I said earlier, I believe that it is impossible to define Olympic Village models or types capable of being exported or applied homogeneously to cities which are heterogeneous by definition, an attempt can be made to systematise the relationship between the Olympic Games and the city and, consequently, the relationship between the Olympic Village and the city. The following sections aim to define four generic cases which could schematically be considered as representative ways of planning an Olympic Village.

Zero Impact

Explained in very simple way, this would be the case for those cities which do not need the Olympic Games or, in other words, cities where the day before and the day after the Games are essentially the same. These are urban nuclei with enormous potential and vitality which have infinite resources to grow, improve and change. They are cities whose prestige is more than proven and whose influence is felt on a world-wide scale. These cities do not need the Olympics to change; the Games needs these cities to enhance their prestige.

One city that could be given as an example of this situation is Los Angeles. As we already know, this city

organised the Olympic Games in 1984 because no other city expressed an interest in hosting them. In line with its own urban logic and with the extremely high level of facilities it had available, Los Angeles chose not to build anything new and to accommodate the athletes in already-existing university residences. Unquestionably, this is the best, most economic and less traumatic system of creating an Olympic Village: not building one.

However, it does pose two major problems: it is hard to apply to most other cities outside the United States, as it is not very usual to find university residences with the same or similar dimensions and characteristics as those in the States. Not even Los Angeles is big enough to accommodate 15,000 people; that led to athletes being spread out, thus contravening one of the most sacred principles of the Games: athletes from any country in the world should be together to interact and share experiences.

Urban Spread

Cities which are clearly experiencing a process of expansion find that the Games are an extraordinarily powerful instrument for directing, channelling and qualifying territories for new colonisation. This could be considered to be the case for Munich in 1972, which strategically used the Olympics to direct urban growth towards relatively peripheral areas in line with the ideas contained in the 1964 general plan.

The objective of this type of strategic action is to provide new neighbourhoods with high level facilities, access infrastructures and services like public places and parks, thus guaranteeing the success of operations which, without the Games, could be questionable and may need long periods of time to be carried out successfully.

Here the impact of the new Olympic Village on the city can be more or less positive depending on how appropriate the urban planning turns out to be. Any voluntary process involves an element of risk and depends on the total volume of investment and the attraction capacity it is able to generate. On the other hand, an area of expansion cannot be contemplated without sorting out the basics of relationship to, communication with and accessibility from the existing city. The other weakness of this strategic option is the lack of a range of uses which generally occurs with this type of Olympic Village during the initial post-Olympic years: the prevalent residential function and the momentary absence of other uses or activities delays or complicates the success of these operations.

Urban Renewal

This was the strategy employed for Barcelona in 1992, where the Games provided the drive behind a general process of urban land-use re-qualification. The raw material was a city with stationary population growth and major urban shortcomings that could be traced back to the 50s. The territorial option chosen by Barcelona for the Games was directed at qualitative and not quantitative factors. That's why the Olympic Village was not that important as an extension of the housing stock. It was, however much more important as strategic element in terms of managing to get the coastal façade re-qualified.

Using the Olympics as a mechanism to re-qualify existing urban land probably produces the most spectacular and beneficial result that could be possibly be secured by an Olympic city. It is also the way which best assures gentle digestion of new residential areas. However, it is undeniably the way which involves the highest degree of

risk requiring rather more complex management.

Mixed Options

Some cities have put forward a combined strategy formed by the two previous options. Seoul is the case that seems to be most exemplary. For this city, the Games involved a decided approach to urban growth even if growth were to take place within the boundaries of the city itself by replacing the existing primary urban fabric. Residential growth provided by the Olympic Villages was eccentrically located, thus strengthening and developing relatively suburban areas yet, at the same time, producing an intense process of land-use re-qualification throughout the city which basically affected the road and transportation infrastructures.

Any city hoping to become an Olympic host will have examined and pondered over the success and failures of former Olympic cities and tried to adopt those aspects which it considered to be the most positive, applicable in that city's particular situation. That is why this mixed model will probably be adopted more often in the future.

A Future Vision

No Olympic city sees the development or stimulus generated by the organisation of the Games as being negative. Neither has there been any historic failure of any Olympic Village model; at most there has been, in some cases, a certain degree of temporary difficulty in incorporating the new residential fabric into the normality of urban life. These observations allow us to affirm that if cities who hope to organise the Games adapt to the general criteria expressed earlier, their success is guaranteed.

As far as the immediate future is concerned, for the Olympic Games of the year 2004, it is odd to find that almost all the eleven candidate cities chose an Olympic Village model similar to Barcelona's, integrated into the existing city and close to the historic centre. Thus, the Olympics will take place in the heart of the city, and this will continue to be the centre of the celebration, of living together and civility. It should be said once again, however, that this option involves a great deal of risk in the sense that expectations drafted on paper may be hard to turn into reality.

I'd like to finish with an optimistic vision of Olympic Villages in the not so immediate future. If the cities with a population over the 2.5-million threshold are analysed, more than five Olympic Games rules can be kept and over 125 cities can add their very own splash of colour to the future Olympic Villages. The names of some of the cities are, in their own right, very suggestive: Alexandria, Algiers, Baghdad, Baltimore, Bangkok, Beijing, Belo Horizonte, Boston, Bucharest, Calcutta, Casablanca, Detroit, Glasgow, Guadalajara, La Habana, Ho Chi Mink, Houston, Johannesburg, Kuala Lumpur, Kyoto, Lima, Manila, Naples, Philadelphia, etc. And when its their turn, these or other cities will know how to create new Olympic Village strategies and concepts which will surprise us and, undoubtedly, go far beyond the constraints of this analysis.