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Beijing Olympics 2008: The View from Vancouver (host to Winter 2010 Olympics)

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By David Luesink

It is interesting to note the similarities between criticisms of Olympic preparation in [Vancouver](#) and [Beijing](#). Although the famously [beautiful city of Vancouver](#) is still two years away from hosting the winter Olympics in conjunction with the mountain village of Whistler, we are already running into the standard problems and criticisms familiar to Olympic planners of the past few decades. While air quality and the national human rights record are not likely to be the major issues for Vancouver, other themes show up on a regular basis in the local press, including [cost overruns](#), [natural disasters](#), [transportation problems](#), and the potential irreversibility of turning the city into a [virtual police state](#). Last week's closure of the highway and rail links between Vancouver and Whistler due to a massive landslide served to show the vulnerability of the "Sea-to-Sky Highway" which connects Vancouver to its world-class winter playground ([map](#)).

Although the Olympics claim to bring people together to celebrate the best in sport apart from politics, the clear links between corporate sponsorships and nationalism as a distraction from the increasing [gap between rich and poor](#) in countries like [China](#) and [Canada](#) are only too obvious in the difference between those who can afford tickets and those who must be content to watch events on television. As in Beijing, many Vancouver residents feel that the Olympics will only exacerbate the problem of housing prices for lower and middle-income earners. The city government reneged on early promises for increasing social housing, so some [critics](#) claim there will be more homeless people than athletes for 2010.

Perhaps the most interesting Olympic-related story of the past few days in Vancouver is the announcement by the head of Vancouver's Olympic Committee that Vancouver's Olympics will not organize an international [torch relay](#) so they can avoid the kind of protests that marred China's relay in London and Paris. Perhaps that is as it should be, given the rather monumental job of overcoming the [apathetic attitude](#) of many Canadians toward Olympic events unrelated to gold medals in [hockey](#).

David Luesink is a Ph.D. Candidate in Chinese history at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

Tags: [The 2008 Beijing Olympics](#), [Vancouver](#), [Winter Olympics](#)