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The 1992 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Barcelona

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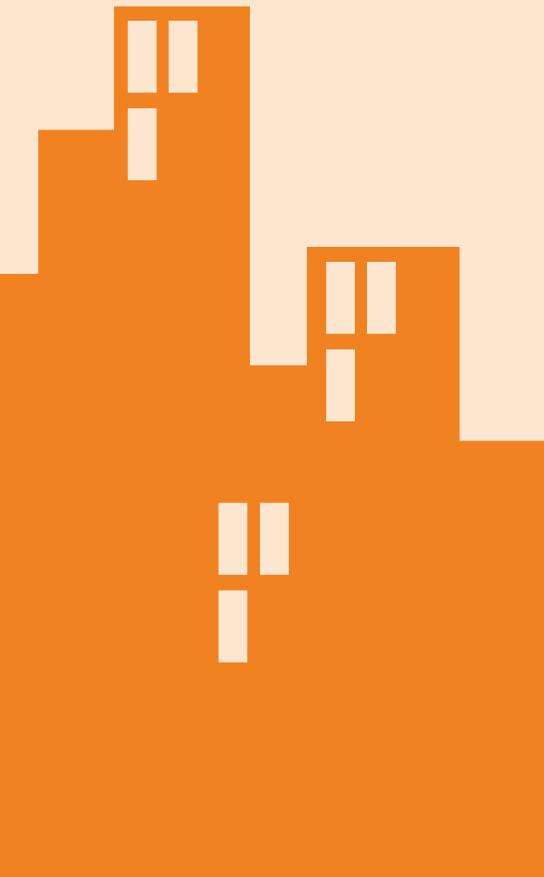
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Les Cahiers de
la Chaire Immobilier et
Développement Durable

The Urban and
Real Estate Legacy
of Mega-Events

Edited by
Ingrid Nappi-Choulet and
Emmanuel de la Masselière



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#6

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The 1992 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Barcelona

Interview with Patrice Ballester Associate Professor of Geography and Tourism Marketing at the École Supérieure de Tourisme Grand Sud, Toulouse, France

Patrice Ballester is an Associate Professor (Ph.D. Qualified) in Geography and Tourism Marketing at the École Supérieure de Tourisme Grand Sud (Tourism School) in Toulouse. He is a specialist and expert in international and universal expositions among the organising authorities. His work focuses on the adaptation of Mediterranean societies and coastlines to globalisation through analyses of landscapes, the environment, urban planning and marketing. He has been published in academic journals and is preparing for the release of his work "Barcelona: City of Exposition, Mega-Events and Tourism". He prefers to study areas such as the Catalan capital, but also researches universal expositions and the Olympic Games, taking into account new tourism strategies and sustainable management (CSR).



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What made Barcelona decide to host the 1992 Olympic Games? What did the city expect?

Barcelona decided to apply for three reasons which are fairly common: To support its growth via the catalyst of urban development, to present a new image of a dynamic and attractive city which is opening up to tourism, and to energise the workforce of the city through a progressive sporting

and humanist movement which would become an integral part of the nation's memory.

The urban and economic contexts play an important role. The first period of urban development in Barcelona, post-Franco (1978-1984), was a matter of systematic intervention in public spaces and of medium-sized road works. **The goal was to rebuild the city itself.** Barcelona reclaimed open spaces to

establish an operational and regulatory urbanism, which was new for Spain at time. The construction of modern public spaces with public stakeholders requires infrastructure to be an operating mode or catalyst with which housing and shops are associated. But in the mid-1980s, the city could not continue these urban rehabilitation and regeneration efforts due to a lack of funds, private investors, and a marketing or communication strategy. The projects to come were enormous: A new ring road, new museums, a new fair, a new cruise and recreational port, a new housing policy.

The Olympics were a solution, much like when Barcelona hosted a universal exposition in 1888, an international one in 1929, a popular Olympiad in 1936 and the Mediterranean Games in 1955. Since the 1970s, a small group of experts had sought to organise an Olympiad or a universal exposition to combine major works, private investment (housing and commercial) and public investments. The vote by the IOC in the city's favour recalls the positive legacy of these previous events.

Finally, the last factor in the bid was geopolitical. The Olympics reinforce the growth of a metropolis based on three attributes: **As a regional capital, a major port of commerce and tourism and as a window into Europe for Spain.** At that time, Barcelona was not yet a European metropolis; it was rising, but it could not do more without an ambitious project. The Olympic Games would be a stroke of luck in its quest to be seen as an ambitious and innovative city.

As for the Spanish Government, it sees in the universal exposition in Seville the same year a means of territorial rebalancing and recognition of a new member state of the European Economic Community (EEC)

There is a “feeling” that the Barcelona Olympics in 1992 embody the Spanish movement of the '80s and '90s, *Movida*. What accounts for this reputation of the most festive games in history?

These mega-events embody an image of a society and a city-state which is more or less formal, more or less propagandistic and sometimes “softened”. This is to be expected with more than three billion viewers and thousands of journalists and press articles before, during and after the Olympiad (the opening and closing ceremonies). With the globalization of tourism and the discovery of a new destination, they expressed a sense of accomplishment, liberation and breaking with old expectations. Barcelona represented the success of Spain, a Spain which wins, opening itself up to sport and investing in the future and the digital economy. And the global becomes local, between the host city and the host country. Beyond the city, the Olympics created an image, sometimes simplified, of a Spain which was capable of adopting all the codes of economic and cultural globalisation.

But the Olympics were not an expression of the unprecedented Spanish cultural movement which was *Movida*. It was more about a commercial *Movida*, not that of the late 1970s and early 1980s, which saw film makers, musicians, graphic artists, and writers freeing themselves from the shackles of Francquism by offering up a new society where young people took their place and adopted new morals, organising wild and spontaneous events. *Movida* was an alternative movement that has become institutionalized. This creative cultural movement modernised Spain and integrated it into the European context: The 1992 Olympic Games were

a culmination or a global expression of this, but it had become increasingly commercial since the mid-1980s. In a sense, Cobi, the Mascot of the Games, is a child of *Movida*.

Barcelona nevertheless remains a separate case because **the organising consortium of the Olympics was the first to develop a cultural, tourism and community programme.**

This cultural, festive and community foundation for the Olympics was striking. From 1988 to 1992, each year an event was organised with a specific theme designed to prepare the population, developing the international tourism offerings and mobilising the community and cultural sectors. For example, 1990, the year of culture and sport, was an opportunity to improve sporting culture and renew traditional types of performance. Multimedia and community networks mobilised throughout Catalonia were extremely valuable to the post-event support strategy for the Olympic Games.

One of the most important achievements of the “Barcelona, city of celebration, shopping and culture, both popular and elite” project is that it integrated Catalan culture, the community culture of city districts and the modern and participatory vision of a global event.

How and in what ways did the Olympics transform the identity and attractiveness of Barcelona? How did Barcelona then capitalise on this festive reputation and identity?

Here we approach one of the most important topics regarding an Olympic bid. **The staging and storytelling of a city through a redefinition of its**

tourist offerings in competition with other global cities. For Barcelona, this was successful because the creation of a modern Tourism Office for the 1992 Olympic Games allowed for a refocusing of its missions: Working on the attractiveness of the city in terms of leisure, business, MICE and corporate conferences, but also using benchmarking and an annual audit to identify new opportunities. The new structure has moved closer to the private sector. This strategy continues to become more powerful, even now. The budgetary communications efforts are similar to those of a country like France. But above all, **the post-Olympic Games, which modelled the tourist offerings and the new city strategy for the next twenty years with, in particular with the *Barcelona shopping line* “city of festivals and shopping”.** The shopping line - an urban circuit for shopping and visiting tourist attractions-become a worldwide point of reference. We can appreciate this completely renewed post-Olympiad image through three simultaneous phenomena: 1/ The urban landscape has new architectural icons and renovated old ones. The city discovers its ports and city beaches, a new heritage is revealed and complements the existing one with the Sagrada Familia as its central point, and, finally, museum, gastronomic and entertainment offerings are redesigned and supported. 2/ The TO organises artistic, cultural and sports programmes in connection with world affairs, or with the unique identity of a city that has obtained numerous sites on the world heritage list, such as the 2002 Year of Gaudí, or the Universal Forum of Cultures (modelled on international expositions) in 2004, a half-success which was finally liquidated in 2017. 3/ Lastly, beginning in 1993 night-life tourism

was a pivotal element in Barcelona's post-Olympic development: The city renting or reselling well-located premises to promote an increase in the evening leisure offerings including well-designed bars, quality theatres and rooftop bars, leading to a tourist night-life aesthetic for all customers. This success spread throughout the city centre and the surrounding areas. In 25 years, the city has risen from the twentieth ranking of tourist metropolises in Europe to the top five

Development operations were undertaken for and around major sporting facilities and the athletes' village: How have these changed the spatial organisation of the city?

The Olympic Port and Port Vell projects are emblematic of the new post-Olympic Barcelona. The city's relationship with the sea has been reversed. It is not entirely true that the city was turning its back on the sea, if you consider the importance of the port and seaside beach-clubs at the beginning of the twentieth century. But the most important rights-of-way and urban wastelands full of public services such as warehouses and a railway were located along the coast, and these were

"In 25 years, the city has risen from the twentieth ranking of tourist metropolises in Europe to the top five."



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A new tourist coastline, sea passage, in Barcelona (Spain).



Olympic Port Marina built for the 1992 Barcelona Olympics (Spain). © silkfactory

neglected and polluted. A new modern sea front has created a neighbourhood near the old city centre in less than six years. The facilities extend the city of leisure along the coast, with a seaside rambla for Port Vell in addition to a shopping and leisure centre (aquarium, bar, restaurants and clubs). For the Olympic Port, the city fitted a brand new recreational port, beaches, a casino and two large towers offering hotels and office space for major Spanish companies. This legacy is consistent with parks and housing which, as a whole, form the new Nova Icariá neighbourhood. The European love of sun and sea combined with increased tourist traffic offered an unprecedented opportunity.

What other major urban transformations have occurred?

Of course, critics will be able to say that there have been forgotten neighbourhoods and eviction effects, but overall **the Olympics have benefited all inhabitants, particularly in the realm of transport:** Road transport networks, motorways (the ring road), large roads, major roundabouts, and mild traffic have been reconfigured. It is true that residents who are not close to the peripheral interchanges have not benefited from a reduced route, but this is not due to the Olympic Games. Any planner is forced to make decisions and choices.



Old Port of Barcelona (Spain).

The most important work can be found in telecommunications and underground urban planning through a complete wiring of the city to European standards, and the creation of business zones with a fast connection to the rest of the world. The urban transformations are significant and surround the four new centralities, but also reach across the new airport, large landscaped parks (Creuta del Coll) and the Collselora telecommunications tower, not to mention the upgrading of the postal public services and, less significantly, the sports infrastructure of FC Barcelona.

As a final point, the Olympic Games have had the opportunity in landscaped

parks and roundabouts to show the Spanish expertise in terms of urban art through contemporary statues, these urban symbols of the future.

Did Barcelona have a vision of functional and social diversity in these new neighbourhoods? Has it tried to achieve this and to what extent did it succeed?

This ambition of functional and social diversity was at the heart of urban planning initiatives in the new centralities. It is incorporated into a broader movement of contemporary city design. In the years 1974-1986, there was an atmosphere of “reclaiming” of public space in an attempt to redesign

the city through the “right to urbanity” principle, a concept which was then very fashionable in the Barcelona intellectual and political spheres. The idea is to preserve territorial and societal coherence through local democracy, the creation and opening up to the public of quality living spaces, as well as the preservation of a certain social diversity through a proactive housing policy, all in a context of shared economic growth in a context of rediscovered mobility within a preserved identity framework of the engineer Cerdà. This principle is part of a movement which fundamentally uses the city and its identity to heal the wounds of Franquism: That is, a policy of mass accommodation in large blocks of buildings, and not taking into account public spaces as an operating mode of the city. **The major Olympic projects are part of this tendency to concentrate, to reduce urban discontinuities and to offer a new urban landscape** allowing residents to live, work, move around and entertain themselves among attractive new centralities, all while unblocking the city centre.

Many of the goals were achieved, but **the Olympics have not been a final point of or a departure from this trend, but rather offered a revelation of the scope of work carried out.** Functional diversity is present nowadays in these new centralities, but not social diversity. New housing rapidly became development opportunities for large groups; social housing was allocated to a certain type of population close to networks of influence.

Have we seen differentiated changes in prices? What was the influence of the Olympics compared to other factors in the increase in prices? Has the real estate market experienced tensions linked to the sale of thousands of homes at the same time and in the same areas after the Olympic Games?

It can be said that with the 1992 Olympic Games, **all of Spain would fall for the dream of the “pisos”,** resold for five times their price after ten years, **a real estate speculation which would eventually cause the largest mortgage crisis in Spain since 2008. Barcelona did not escape this.**

Tensions rose between 1993 and 1995, but growth picked up again quickly and all the houses found buyers. In fact, the Olympics were a great opportunity for real estate groups.

Has Barcelona seen these Olympic neighbourhoods become gentrified as is the case in other cities?

For the Nova Icaria, the Olympic Port district, we cannot identify gentrification because before the creation of the neighbourhood, there was only urban wasteland. For the districts of the Diagonal, Val d’Hebron, Badalona (sea front) and Casteldelfells in the suburbs, the increase in prices is clear, but for Montjuïc-Sants - a district which was already comfortable and suburban- the effects are more difficult to define. Generally, however, real estate prices at a local and national level saw an increase. The effects of this spike in real estate must be linked to the new Barcelona business society, based on commercial and leisure activities. San Cugat del Vallès inherited a large sports centre that increased the interest of



© Patrice Ballester

A real estate tourism and rental investment.; Advertising poster near the Olympic Port of Barcelona (Spain)

the wealthiest in this residential zone; it became a very popular municipality in the long term. In general, the new amenities created for the Olympics raised real estate prices. The areas of Nou Barris/Horta Guinardó/Sarrià were somewhat neglected by the Olympic Games and thus saw weak property speculation, but since the 2000s, urban development has in turn arisen there.

How did Barcelona transform these facilities?

Re-use was planned as soon as the Games were obtained in order to achieve optimal facility transformation, usually for schools, athletes, tertiary and municipal services, but also for community use and real-estate investment. The legacy of the Olympic

Games resulted from the desire of public stakeholders to retain elements of this incredible urban transformation, unique at the time for the Olympic cities, as a model for many hosting candidacies, with an Olympic museum, Olympic tourist attractions, specific

"The legacy of the Olympic Games resulted from the desire of public stakeholders to retain elements of this incredible urban transformation, unique at the time for the Olympic cities."

archives grouped together in the various institutions of the city, and the centre of Olympism and research at the Autonomous University of Barcelona.

How have the Olympics changed the Catalan economy?

The Olympics have brought growth to the whole of Catalonia, this is indisputable. A multitude of articles and reports on this subject have been published by private, public and research institutions. We can clearly see that all these developments, all this infrastructure and national, regional and European funding have had a positive effect on growth and the fall in unemployment.

Economic players saw the change in strategy; **services have increased to the detriment of industry which has become uncompetitive.** During this era, instead of building factories, we began building hotels...

To what extent have the Olympics contributed to regional integration?

The 1992 Olympic Games made it possible to connect Barcelona and Catalonia to Spain and Europe, and easy accessibility attracts new customers: tourists. Regional integration has also occurred at the level of Catalonia. The various Olympic municipalities were connected in a network to welcome tourists, participants, delegations and above all sporting events such as rowing or canoeing-kayaking. Relationships changed; we saw an acceleration of the process of urbanisation and concentration of economic, cultural and political powers in Barcelona.

At that time, relations between the region and the central government were at their peak, political players were not pro-independence but rather autonomist, with a vision of sharing and return on investment for both Catalonia and Spain regarding the effects of the Olympics. The local programmes

expressly refer to autonomist but not separatist Catalanism, with the King of Spain speaking in Catalan at the opening ceremony, and all of Spain proud of what is happening in Catalonia.

As for its governance model, it is an ad hoc structure which was created with a goal of giving a platform to all private and public stakeholders to finance projects. Cooperation is necessary, however there is no such thing as a metropolitan organisation with democratic power, rather this is an era of consensus, consultation and debate with management focused on environmental quality, but also economically viable sustainable urban development.

What social, technical and urban innovations have resulted from the Olympic Games?

There remains the central idea of the new centralities, which was at the heart of the Joan Busquets project for the second phase of the major works between 1984 and 1992. This made it possible to choose abandoned areas far from the city centre, which would become new centres or hubs for the tertiary economy all while creating neighbourhood life, particularly for the Val d'Hebron and the Olympic Port district. The legacy is present in the operating modes of the heavy infrastructure (stadium, pool, multisport park, shopping centre). Housing, high-quality public spaces and a new vision of the post-modern city of service were born. A whole generation of architects, town planners and public and private developers forged a common reputation and a shared ambition which created an image of quality and efficiency unparalleled even now.

One of the most positive effects of the Olympic Games was the 1990 creation

of the first Strategic Plan. 180 business people, public sector personalities, and volunteers participated. The first plan clearly indicated the strategic vision *"of an entrepreneurial European city, which has an influence on the macro-region in which it is located with a socially balanced quality of life strongly based in Mediterranean culture"*, that says it all.

What negative impacts on urban development can you identify?

The commercialisation of the areas most coveted by the financial and real estate groups is one example, but also the fact that it has significantly destroyed and not sufficiently reflected on what should be saved of our industrial heritage. At that time, the industrial past needed to be brought to a close. The excessive debt carried by the municipality following the Olympic Games which would unbalance the relationship between the private construction sector and public players

for more than ten years. There are areas like Diagonal Mar which are resented by a section of the local population. Finally, Barcelona has focused its development on mass urban tourism which has partially distorted the city. The party city has reached certain limits.

"The 1992 Games were more than Olympiads; they were a project of a new, optimistic society, open to Europe, democratic, of a nation and a region in harmony."

The 1992 Games were more than Olympiads; they were a project of a new, optimistic society, open to Europe, democratic, of a nation and a region in harmony. "Good government" was put in place; civil society displayed cultural and economic projects which allowed for a sustainable urban development. This Olympiad has become a model for each host city application to the IOC. ■



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Through some twenty interviews with researchers, academics, elected officials and urban architects, this sixth edition of the Cahiers de la Chaire Immobilier et Développement Durable de l'ESSEC takes a critical look at the urban and real estate-related effects of major events on the cities that host them (Olympic and Paralympic Games and World Exps).

It puts the urban and real estate legacy left behind by previous events in perspective with Paris' expectations of the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games, to which it will be host and World Expo 2025, to which it could have been hosted if Paris' candidacy had been maintained.

During the bidding process, as Paris confirms, the awaited impacts on development and real estate and urban re-development are tremendous. Post-time analyses in Europe, Brazil and Japan show that they differ from case to case. In some instances, the outcomes are mixed or even negative: white elephants are marooned, and the debt left behind has an impact on city finances for decades. In others, to the contrary, the outcomes are strikingly positive: a neighbourhood is created, or a city changes dimension and trajectory.

Looking at each of these situations, this Cahier brings to light the conditions for successful mega-events.

The most important is that the legacy be taken into consideration already upstream, from the bidding phase. The second is the development of a strategy for maximising the value of the event: the event is not, from an urban perspective, an end-purpose, but a fantastic opportunity for development; beyond the media enthusiasm, it strengthens and speeds up a project's dynamic.

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