

Barcelona: Urban Transformation and 92' Olympic Games



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Abstract

In February 2005 my International Tourism class went to Barcelona for a study tour, and the theme of the study tour was “Mega-events, Olympic and Barcelona”. The purpose of this paper is to serve as a pre-tour background research. To focus on the subject, I start from the impacts of mega-events and link to Olympic as the most attention-drawing occasion. The following part of the paper introduces the history of Olympic Games and how its requirement of venue constructions developed over the years and its effects on the hosting cities. Out of the past several hosting cities, our destination - Barcelona is a successful example in creating its lasting Olympic Legacy, so the second half of the paper dedicates to this city: from its history of city transformation to the Olympic Games 1992. The process and details of its modern transformation which was set off by the Game 1992 were specially elaborated.

Mega-Events - Impacts

Many studies have concentrated on the impact of Mega-Events, and most of them are done by the principle organization bodies to conclude the events. The research mainly focused on two aspects: economic impacts which are measured in monetary terms and the intangible social impact which are captured by surveys.

For all range of mega-events, a routine method of the economic impact is to measure the cost and benefit in monetary terms. Use Olympic Games as an example: in general, the “cost” of the game includes the organisational expenditures (those for aspects not usable after the event) and project expenditures (those usable after the event). The organisational expenditures were the true “cost”, the net cost, of which nothing would remain afterwards (Brunet, 1995). Revenue of the Games, on the other hand, can be generated through many sources such as sponsorships, bidding on television rights, ticket sales and expenditures by visitors.

Other changes brought by events can be categorized into two kinds: tangible and intangible. The tangible impacts denote the visible, physical changes in the host cities: almost all mega events require new constructions or expansion of existing facilities at some degree. By looking back, we can see that some of these buildings’ architectural style are truly impressive and some of them eventually turned out to be worldwide-recognized monuments: for example, the Eiffel Tower is standing as a legacy for the Paris Exhibition in 1889., as well as a piece of renowned French landmark today.

The intangible benefit a host can have is brought by media’s powerful global coverage: by broadcasting events, the host city has also been put under the spotlight and has the chance to present itself to the world. Evidently, for a city, the motivation of hosting a mega-event does not only rely on the short term monetary benefit, but it also hopes to create positive international awareness of the city in the post-event period.

Olympic as a Mega Sports Event

The topics of Mega-events and Olympic Games are closely related and often been studied together. The sporting competition has always been universal, and in the recent years the public interest in international sporting events such as Olympic Games increased to some extent that has tended to eclipse and overshadow part of the traditional role of commercial fairs and exhibitions (Chalkley & Essex, 1999). Since 1896¹ the Games were revived as a tradition sport competition event which takes place every four years, and in recent decades it has developed into an international social event which brings huge impact to hosting communities: it represents opportunities for economical regeneration, infrastructural investment, environmental improvement, as well as a mean to achieve international prominence and national prestige through “Place Marketing”(Chalkley & Essex, 2005).

As I mentioned earlier, the main benefit of hosting Olympic Games comes from the emerging power of international media network. For a typical Olympic Game hosting city, out of all its income sources, the sponsorship and selling of TV right make up the bigger portions because the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has a television policy to ensure maximum presentation of the Games to the widest possible audience free of charge, and sponsors and media companies are willing to pay high bidding to have this great opportunities to be exposed to the world audience (Preuss, 2002). The principle spectators of any modern Olympic Games are in front of televisions; as a consequence, the hosting city becomes well-known to the world, and its name is often mentioned in pair with “Olympic Games”.

However, there are many more aspects to be considered when a city decides to be nominated as a hosting city. For the various stakeholders, hosting such an event in their city can be interpreted in different ways: for the policy makers, the priority is to increase the capacity of public transportation and muscle the city’s security system; for the urban planners, it is an opportunity for infrastructure investment and environmental improvement; for the local residents, they feel proud of their city but also hassled by the pre-game constructions and huge volume of visitor

¹ The first modern version of Olympic Games was taken place at Athens, in 1896.

flows during the game. Later in the paper, I will look into the Barcelona examples of how it balanced these issues by city regeneration.

Olympic Games – History

The origin of Olympic Games can be traced back to the Ancient Greece time. Between 776 BC and 261 AD, the Olympic Games were staged as a five-day event with the competition of running, wrestling, horse racing, chariot race and pentathlon. Centuries later, different series of “Olympic Games” were revived and staged at various places in England.²

It was not until 1890, when a French Nobleman Baron Pierre de Coubertin (1863 – 1937) visited Dr. Brookes, who was the organizer of the “second series” of the Games, that an ambition of reviving the modern Olympic games was born. De Coubertin believed physical exercise is the basis of a balanced education and organizing sports events is an agent that establishes international unity and social equality. His idea of reviving the ancient Olympic game received enormous support from the Sports Congress at Sorbonne. The modern Olympic Games were to be held every four years in different cities to serve the goal of promoting the Olympic spirit of freedom, progress and equality throughout the world (Grupe, 1999).

The original objectives and principle that De Coubertin established are still the core values of Olympics Games nowadays:

1. Fostering the goals of competitive sports.
2. Providing a legacy of facilities that will stimulate athletic development which would not have been possible with inferior facilities.
3. Heightening the profile of the sports involved by providing better opportunities for training as well as site for national and international competition (Hall, 1997).

² 1612 – 1852, originally organised by Captain Robert Dover at Dover’s hill, England
1849 – 1889, by Dr. W.P. Brookes at Much Wenlock, England.

Source: www.Olympics.org

From the statement of De Coubertin, it is not hard to imagine that in the early period most cities lacked sufficient sport facilities for athletes and Olympic Games also served as an occasion for hosting cities to build or upgrade sport venue and training sites. However, the implication of construction for Olympics has changed over the past century: from necessity to luxury.

Modern Olympic Games – Venue Construction

As the owner of Olympic Games, International Olympic Committee (IOC)'s role is to promote top-level sport as well as sport for everybody in accordance with the Olympic Charter³. In the Charter, it states the mandatory requirements such as all sports competition, the Opening and Closing Ceremonies must take place in the host city and IOC executive board holds the exclusive right on approvals of venue sites. However, it does not provide much detail on the construction guidelines. Petros Synadinos, an architecture planner from the Greece National Olympic Committee pointed out that the post Olympic use of the construction projects is the key to success thus extending the legacy of the Games. As he suggested, in order to achieve this goal, the urban planners of the host city should take these issues into consideration (Synadinos, 2002):

1. Good functional and balanced public network, including transportation, communication, aesthetic, and environment
2. Inclusion of all buildings to be constructed for the Olympic games in a flexible structure so in the post-Olympic period it will not only incorporate the new buildings into the everyday functions for its residents, but will also provide for their use to serve as a central social center for the surrounding area

For the several recent games, the bidding cities have layout plans for bigger construction works to prove their capability of hosting Olympic Games. However, it was not the usual norm of Olympic until the 60's. Historically, the impact on the city's infrastructure improvement and investment can be divided into four phases (Chalkley & Essex, 2004):

³ Last reviewed in 2004

Phase One: 1896 – 1904

Games: 1896 Athens, 1900 Paris, 1904 St. Louis

Features: Small scale, poorly organized and not necessarily involving any new development

Phase Two: 1908 – 1932

Games: 1908 London, 1912 Stockholm, 1920 Antwerp, 1924 Paris, 1928 Amsterdam, 1932 Los Angeles

Features: Small Scale, better-organized and involving construction of purpose-built sports facilities

Phase Three: 1936 – 1956

Games: 1936 Berlin, 1948 London, 1952 Helsinki, 1956 Melbourne

Features: Large Scale, well-organized and involving construction of purpose built-sport facilities with some impact on urban infrastructure

Phase Four: 1960 – 2000

Games: 1960 Rome, 1964 Tokyo, 1968 Mexico City, 1972 Munich, 1976 Montreal, 1980 Moscow, 1984 Los Angeles, 1988 Seoul, 1992 Barcelona, 1996 Atlanta, 2000 Sydney

Features: Large Scale, well-organized and involving construction of purpose-built sports facilities with significant impact on urban infrastructure

Why has the scale of construction and organization of the Game grown enormously? The size of participants flowing into the city grows: for example, during a typical Summer Games, about 10,000 athletes, 10,000 officials, and 20,000 journalists and media representatives need to be accommodated in the Olympic village, not to mention a large number of visitors coming into the city. To accompany the needs of this-short term accommodation and supporting infrastructures, temporary or permanent constructions are raised for the Games. However, to avoid waste resource and “white elephant” after the Games, a city planner needs to learn lessons from previous games and plan carefully with the consideration of utilizing constructions for the post-game period.

Urban Transformation of Barcelona - History

The history of Barcelona using mega-events to transform and promote started in 1888 when it was the host of Universal Exposition 1888. The slogan “Paris of the South” was used to reposition the city in a new image. However, the real city campaign began in 1901 when the “Lliga Regionalista”- the “industrial” and nationalist party - entered the Town council and started to apply its new urban policy (Roca, 1979; DeRiquer 1992). The policy focused on the idea of building an ideal city with ordered neighborhoods and great monuments. In 1903 Barcelona Town Council posted an urban design competition of a great “Plan de Enlaces” (Plan of connection) and the French Architect Leon Jaussely won approval to have the opportunity to create the blueprint of Barcelona Urban Policy. In Jaussely’s plan, the aim was to introduce the “zoning” concept, so to establish a clear functional structure in the urban area. Moreover, the plan emphasized on urban forms and architecture, which also reflected the “Beautiful City” project in Europe at the time. Beside Jaussely’s plan, there were other suggestions providing important guidelines for city improvement that happened later: the restoration of historical centre; several urban projects which reflected the specific intention of monumentalizing some urban space (Monclus, 2000).

The marketing of the city towards international tourists started in 1908. Along with several other European cities, the “Society for the attraction of foreigners” was created in Barcelona, and it showed a new image of ‘Cosmopolitan Barcelona’ in order to lure tourists into the city. Some projects were undertaken at this period: the modern monuments such as the “Sagrada Familia Church”⁴; the representative city center Plaza de Catalunya and Paseo de Gracia; the modern high rise buildings in the Gothic quarter. The historical buildings and modern monuments were well-blended and showed the appreciation of Barcelona’s glory in the past, as well as a modern image of the city (Gracia Espuche and Navas, 1994). Later on, a new landmark in Montjuic Mountain was completed along with the opening of Universal Exposition 1929 in Barcelona (Monclus, *ibid*).

⁴ By Antonio Gaudi

Barcelona & the Olympic Games 1992

Barcelona did not stop at where it was and took its vibrant architectural tradition into the modern days and once again undertook an impressive urban transformation prior to the Olympic Games 1992. The city council of Barcelona claims that Olympic Games played a huge role in setting off some regeneration plans. The city went through a transformation and eventually changed its image from a typical industrial city to a flexible city.

The major Olympic construction involves works such as opening up the sea front to the city, restoring the historical buildings in Gothic Quarters and on Montjuic Mountain and building the ring roads around the metropolitan area. Some famous Architects were even invited to design new projects: Calatrava⁵ for the Montjuic Telecommunications Tower; Gregotti⁶ for the reconstruction of the Montjuic Stadium; Pei⁷ for the International Trade Centre at the port; and Isozaki⁸ for the Palau San Jordi gymnasium.

Many projects needed to be completed prior to the Games; however, the majority of them were not directly used for the Games. Barcelona has planned the projects strategically so the maximum number of useful investment can be left behind after the Games. The Principal Olympic projects imposed a structural effect on the city, and their classes were as follows, in the order of importance (Brunet, 1995):

1. Roads and transportation infrastructures
2. Housing, office, and commercial venues
3. Telecommunications and services
4. Hotel facilities

⁵ An architect from Spain, for more of his information go to his official website <http://www.calatrava.com>

⁶ An architect from Italy, for more of his information go to his official website <http://www.gregottiassociati.it/>

⁷ An American Chinese Architect, for his biography go to http://www.greatbuildings.com/architects/I._M._Pei.html

⁸ An architect from Japan, for more of his information go to his official website http://www.c-channel.com/c00005/index_en.html

5. Sports facilities
6. Environmental infrastructures

The following table compares the portion of expenditures categories of Olympic Games 92' with other Games. Out of the five Games, Barcelona had the second biggest portion on indirect investment, which mainly focused on the first four construction classes as stated above. This clears states that Barcelona learned the lesson from the past games and tried to minimize the true cost of the Games and invested heavily on infrastructures which have been utilized extendedly after the Games.

Table 1. Investment Related to the Olympic Games

	Tokyo '64		Montreal '76		Los Angeles '84		Seoul '88		Barcelona '92	
In Millions of US\$	M of \$	%	M of \$	%	M of \$	%	M of \$	%	M of \$	%
Direct	452,116	2.7%	2,824,863	89.0%	522,436	100.0%	1,467,853	46.5%	2,460,855	26.2%
Expenditures										
Operational	169,510	1.0%	411,857	13.0%	450,394	86.2%	478,204	15.2%	1,361,156	14.5%
Expenditures										
Direct Investments	282,605	1.7%	2,413,006	76.0%	72,042	13.8%	989,649	31.4%	1,099,699	11.7%
Indirect										
Expenditures										
Indirect	6,373,372	97.3%	350,012	11.1%			1,687,423	53.5%	6,915,274	73.8%
Investments										
Total Olympic	6,825,488	100.0%	3,174,857	100.0%	522,436	100.0%	3,155,276	100.0%	9,376,129	100.0%
Investments										

Source: Brunet, 1995

There are also other accompanying facilities of Olympic such as hotels, restaurants, and entertainment centers which were promoted and invested by private parties. The Private projects made up to 37.2% of the Olympic projects (Brunet, *ibid*), and they were mainly involved in the following areas:

1. Housing
2. Hotels
3. Entrepreneurial centre

4. Toll motorways

Table 2. Construction for the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games

Investment projected and initiated between 1986 and 1993	Accumulated values in current pesetas	Distribution
Road Construction	343,804,115,503	35.9%
Construction at the Poble Nou Olympic Area	212,681,960,000	22.2%
Construction in other Olympic areas of Barcelona	117,973,650,000	12.3%
Montjuic Area	58,138,020,000	6.1%
Vall d'Hebron Area	29,425,740,000	3.1%
Diagonal Area	30,409,980,000	3.2%
Other Projects in Barcelona	182,449,775,658	19.1%
New Western urban axis	7,979,130,000	0.8%
New Eastern urban axis	16,395,880,000	1.7%
Remodelation of Old Port	6,890,000,000	0.7%
Service Galleries	10,071,325,658	1.1%
Other Facilities (cultural, sanitary, and other)	21,229,090,000	2.2%
Improvement of hotel facilities	119,884,350,000	12.5%
Projects in Olympic sub-sites	69,916,420,000	7.3%
Other Sports infrastructure projects	29,804,169,039	3.1%
Total	956,630,090,000	100%

Source: Brunet, 95

Most of the major projects have long-lasting impact on Barcelona, even into the years of post-Olympic period. Several examples will be discussed in details:

1. Vila Olimpica and the Sea Front

The Olympic village was developed on a 130 hectares site at Parc de Mar, which was the most transformed site preparing for Olympic 1992 (Barcelona NOC, 1992). It was built by the Barcelona Holding Olimpic, S.A. (HOLSA), a matrix company also involved in the construction in the Olympic Ring.

Before the game, the land was occupied as industrial land, and it was separated from the rest of the city. There were two railway lines connecting the site to the city primary for shipping use. The Olympics provided an opportunity to re-develop the area which involves reconstructing the railway network, building a costal ring road, developing the Olympic village and Olympic Harbour and reconstructing the sewage system.

The district was eventually opened up to Barcelona inhabitants and with an easy access to its 5.2 km coastline. Nowadays the new beaches and waterfront facilities have transformed the landscape and become a new leisure attraction for both locals and visitors.

The whole series of regenerating the coastline in the early 90's not only sufficiently provided the necessary infrastructures for the Olympic Games, but also created a continuing force to redefine the city in a bigger content.

2. Ring Road

As the top priority of the city upgrading plan, the construction of the ring road of Barcelona aimed to improve its existing road system so to facilitate the increase traffic flow during the Games. Large amount of public funds have been invested in modification in the road network⁹. It is the key roads to move around the circumference of Barcelona.

After opening of the Dalt and Litoral ring road in the Olympics period, the immediate effect on the city was the increased circulation of motor vehicles which was evidently shown by the comparison of traffic density in 1990 and in 1993(Brunet).

3. The Olympic Ring

As mentioned earlier, the City of Barcelona has always been proud of its heritage and tends to emphasis this feature as part of the promotion plan during mega-events. Prepared for the Olympic 1992, the extensive area of Montjuic hill has been renewed and was given a new

⁹ Table 2, "Road construction"

identity “The Olympic Ring”. The constructions include: The Stadium and the acclimatisation garden which were used for the Universal Exposition 1929 was rebuilt; the façade and the Picornell Swimming pool which were built in 1969 were renewed to meet modern guidelines. Two additional brand-new buildings were constructed: the Sant Jordi Sports Hall by Arata Isozaki, and the National Institute of Physical Education of Catalonia (Barcelona City Council, 2005).

Impact of Olympic 1992

The impact of Barcelona Olympic 1992 can be divided as economic and non-economic. Economic Impacts are mainly from construction projects realized for the Games. The induced impact is the largest portion among the overall impact and it started as counted from five years prior to the Games year, since constructions need time (Brunet, *Ibid*). The following table shows the brief categories of the economic impacts and their distributions in percentage.

Table 3. Economic Impact of the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games

<i>Period 1986 – 1993</i>	<i>In Millions of Current Pesetas</i>	<i>Distribution</i>
Direct accumulated impact	1,165,600	37.5%
Investment	956,630	30.8%
Public Investment	643,613	20.7%
Private Investment	313,017	10.1%
Consumption	208,970	6.7%
COOB’92:current expenditures	162,880	5.2%
Consumption of Visitors	46,090	1.5%
Induced accumulative impact	1,942,188	62.5%
Total accumulative impact	3,107,788	100.0%

Source: Brunet, 1995

However, as mentioned before, economic impact is not the priority for host cities. Barcelona succeeded in “marketing itself” through Olympic ’92: a survey which took place in 1992 showed that visitors gave the city high evaluation, especially for the Olympic events, the Olympic atmosphere, Olympic facilities and Olympic signage (Brunet, 1993b). The survey also captured a

strong preference of investors willing to locate in Barcelona due to the city's availability of services and labor, its market and the overall competitiveness.

Another achievement which is worth noting is that Barcelona's dedication to Architecture was recognized by the professional industry by receiving the Royal Gold Medal in 1999 which was awarded by the Royal Institute of British Architects. Since 1848, the medallion has been rewarded to individuals whom had outstanding services to architecture, and the precedent was broken for the first time to award the medal to a city instead of an individual.

Conclusion

Organizing mega-events has becoming a trend in cities to promote themselves. However, this "happening" business is not for everyone: as we have seen, the requirements of facilities are moving to the luxury scale, and if not planned carefully, white elephants can be left after and that will also impose unwanted financial burden on the city. The Barcelona story tells that mega events such as Olympic Games do not necessarily have an immediate positive impact on the economy, and the motivation of cities competing for hosting does not depend on the one – time profit it could possibly gain. Nevertheless, by planning constructions of venue and upgrading infrastructures strategically, the hosting city could create a legendary effect in terms of improved city image and suburban renewal. In the case of Barcelona, the city launched deliberately several projects in the call of Olympic and we are expected to see that they all revive till nowadays: its seafront is the most hit place to spend time for the young generation; its ring road still serves as the major traffic lane around the city, and the sports facilities on the Montjuic hill are constantly occupied by locals.

In the larger region of the city, a few Olympic projects may not make a visual difference, but they create continuation of urban regeneration. As the host of The Forum 2004, Barcelona once again created an urban legend by building up the new complex on the seafront between Barcelona and Sant Adrià de Besòs area. It is evident that urban design and planning are now used in a more systematic way to sell the city. The city of Barcelona has gone through a process of changing its image from a dull industrial city to a dynamic meeting place for business and

leisure. By positioning itself as an international cultural and business meeting point, Barcelona is competing with some world-class cities such as London, New York, and Paris.

The yardstick to measure one city's success is through demographic change: whether the city attracts more inhabitants to move in and make good livings or whether the city draws more visitors as a destination. Due to the limitation of the paper, I cannot explore more on this aspect. Nevertheless, it is interesting to gather some figures and to study the positive changes Barcelona has in the post-Olympic era.

If a study tour could be possibly made in the future, I would like to visit the Olympic sites and projects I have studied and see them myself in order to appreciate the architect design and landscapes in the real setting. Brunet's paper also mentioned the other aspect of Barcelona's urban transformation as generated by "Olympic" investment is the circulation of motor vehicles and I have concerns over the traffic condition in the city. Therefore I would like to find out what the traffic problems are and how the official departments are coping with them.

Urban regeneration and transformation is a never-ending challenge: there are still many post-industrial wasteland in the city needed to be renewed and brought to life by city planners and private investors. As long as Barceloners have the ambition to do so, the city will be on the map of "international cities" in the near future.

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