
Olympic Legacy in an Olympic City: Monuments, Museums and Memory

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Almost every Olympic city, since the Games were revived in 1896, has some form of legacy whether it be in the form of buildings, monuments, art, galleries and museums, repositories and archives, stamps, souvenirs, memorabilia, plaques, and even street names. Then there are the local Olympic champions who are living reminders of a city's and country's Olympic experience. There are also oral memories and stories of the Games that are treasured by individual citizens. More mundane legacy includes debts (and occasional profits) for a city and its taxpayers. Most cities have some post-Games ceremonies to mark anniversaries of the Games, which are, in part, attempts to recapture some of the magic of the Olympic moment and to place the Olympics in the history of the city. All of the above forms of legacy demonstrate that a particular city has a unique status - that of an Olympic city. It is one of only 21 cities on four continents that have earned the right to stage the Summer Games, or one of 17 other cities that have staged the Winter Games. There is also an elite group, which have earned the right to stage the Games twice: Athens, London, Los Angeles and Paris (Summer Games), and Innsbruck, Lake Placid and St Moritz (Winter Games).

Legacy varies enormously from city to city. The organisers of the 1896 Games restored the ancient Panathenian Stadium, using pure marble from Mount Pentelicon, the quarry site which provided the marble in the stadium's original construction in 330 BC. The stadium marble, which glistened brilliantly in the sun, added to the sense of occasion when the Games began. The major event at preliminary ceremonies, the day before the Games, was the unveiling of a life-size statue of Georgios Averoff, in front of the stadium. Averoff's donation of approximately one million drachmas enabled Athenians to restore one of its most historic sites (Howell and Howell, p. 6) and to create a grand monument for the modern Olympics. Money from the generous benefactor also enabled Athens to build a shooting gallery, a velodrome, and a pier for spectators.

The "legacy" of the 1900 Paris Olympics, by contrast, was one of "confusion and controversy" because its organisation was so chaotic (Howell, p. 17). Initially it was Coubertin's dream to "reconstruct the ancient site of Olympia at the exposition - its temples, stadia, gymnasia, and statues" (Findling and Pelle, p. 13) but the organisers decided to scrap these plans preferring instead to showcase French culture and civilisation. Because the Olympic Games had such a low profile, there were no special athletic facilities: swimming and diving took place in the polluted River Seine and track and field was performed in the Bois de Boulogne, the private property of the Racing Club of France. The Olympics occupied this site on a temporary basis and the organisers were allowed few liberties with this attrac-

tive property. There was a line of trees between spectators who sat in a hastily-erected and temporary grandstands and it was disconcerting for discus and javelin athletes when their throws ended up in wooded areas. The 1900 Games, which were lost in a world fair, left no footprints on Paris, there were no monuments, and little memorabilia. Not even the memory of the Paris Olympics has been treasured: one Australian athlete, Stan Rowley, described the Games as a “HUGE JOKE”: “to treat these events as world’s championships would be really an insult to the important events they are supposed to be” (Howell and Howell, p. 17). Although the St Louis Games of 1904 also suffered, because it was an adjunct of an exposition, this city has attempted to take some pride in its Olympic legacy. An Olympic Museum has been created to commemorate the city’s Olympic involvement.

Reflecting the growing status of the Olympic movement, legacy was built to last by the time of the Stockholm Games in 1912. A stadium, which was specifically erected for the Games in the royal zoological garden, was a “fine edifice ... with mighty arches, vaults, and towers” and could accommodate 22,000 spectators. The Swedish architect, Torben Grut, preferred to create “a new style that reflected practicality and the Northern European tradition” rather than imitating Greek art (Findling and Pelle, p. 42). The stadium had an ongoing purpose in that it was constructed both for sport and festivals of all kinds and, in winter, could be converted into a skating rink.

The emergence of the cultural Olympics was yet another facet of an interest in legacy. It was a movement which was dear to Coubertin’s heart: he sent a circular to IOC members in 1906 convening an advisory conference “to come and study the way in which art and literature could be included in the celebration of the modern Olympiads.” It was an attempt to “reestablish the original beauty of the Olympic Games ... [when] ... the fine arts were combined harmoniously with the Olympic Games to create their glory” (Müller, pp. 69-70). Although culture has struggled to compete with sport in the Olympics, the conscious development of a cultural tradition is an important part of the Olympic legacy.

There is also great variation in terms of legacy as to whether an Olympic stadium was built simply to serve the immediate pragmatic purpose of staging the Games or whether it was built to last beyond the Games so as to convey a longer term Olympic vision. Held just after World War I, the Antwerp Games of 1920, was hastily organised and suffered from a shortage of money and materials. Athletes were housed in primitive accommodation in local schools. The rebuilt Beerschot Stadium had some impressive-looking “Greek decoration, including a grandiose arch and columns,” but it was not made to last because the decorations were made of plaster (Renson, p. 81). They had disappeared within a year of the Games.

In recent decades there have been more extravagant attempts to create permanent Olympic monuments and precincts. The ambition of Montreal Mayor Jean Drapeau was “to create a lasting symbol of *la survivance*, the will of French Canada to survive two centuries of English Canadian attempts at assimilation” (Findling & Pelle, p. 154). Some of the extravagant monuments included an Olympic Stadium which included a “retractable roof and a fifty-storey tower” and a spectacular and innovative velodrome which consisted of a “giant arc of roof sweeping over glass walls.” The main legacy of Montreal, however, was a massive debt incurred due to the large capital costs, a debt which still has not been paid. It is ironic that while the Montreal organisers have been criticised for their extravagance and many of the new facilities proved too costly to maintain for sports, the Olympic precinct has proved successful as a tourist attraction.

Barcelona, by contrast, planned a permanent Olympic precinct which included a reconstructed main stadium, a magnificent indoor facility, and an Olympic gallery, run by a foundation. Although it was created in 1988, four years before the Games, the Centre for Olympic Studies at the Autonomous University of Barcelona is part of the city’s legacy. It is a legatee in two senses: it is part of Barcelona’s Olympic heritage and it is also one of a number of bodies that oversees and maintains the city’s Olympic legacy. Barcelona attempted to use the Games to enhance the profile of the city: \$8.1 million was spent on new roads, an airport, hotels, telecommunications, and a new seafront resort.

There is an interesting history yet to be written as to what happens to Olympic facilities (such as stadia), artifacts, and material used in opening ceremonies, after the Games. Atlanta’s main stadium has been converted back to a ball park and the cauldron, home of the Olympic flame during the Games, “was dismantled and moved up the street so it wouldn’t mar the sightlines of the Olympic stadium turned baseball park” (*Atlanta Journal and Constitution* 7 Nov. 1997). Some Olympic facilities, such as Montreal’s velodrome, have been given a new non-sporting use. The velodrome is now an aquarium.

The vision that inspired developments at other Olympic sites has not always been sustained, resulting in decline and degradation in some instances. Melbourne’s Olympic village was built on 59 acres at Heidelberg, about 13 kilometres from the main stadium. The Olympic program described how the 840 brick and concrete houses were painted in “gay modernistic colours.” The desired effect was that of an English village. £60,000 was spent on landscaping the site.

However, by the 1990s the model village had degenerated into a suburban slum. One writer commented in 1993:

If the Olympic spirit flickers there still, it is for the endurance events - endurance of poverty, crummy housing and, above all, of being consistently marked down as a failure. For even the staunchest supporters of this blighted public housing estate ... concede that while it was constructed as a model village for winners, the reputation that has lingered longer is that of a dumping ground for losers (Bagnall, p. 46).

Melbourne represents one of those mid-twentieth century hosts which has few visible reminders of the Olympics. The Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) is better known as a home for cricket and Australian football. It was converted to an Olympic stadium for 1956, the outfield was dug up and cinder tracks were laid, but after the Games it reverted to its original use. Ironically, the issue of Olympic legacy was not really addressed until 1986 when the Australian Gallery of Sport was opened at a site attached to the MCG. However, while the Museum has a good Olympic collection, it also covers all the major Australian sports. It is intriguing to note that for over two decades, the cauldron receptacle for the Olympic flame was misplaced. When it was rediscovered in the 1980s it was restored and erected in the vicinity of the Australian Gallery of Sport.

Legacy is an important issue because much of the power of the Olympic Movement derives from its sites and symbols and its ancient heritage. It is one of the strengths of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) that it has carefully nurtured and guarded Olympic legacy at its central site, Lausanne, where the Olympic Museum documents both the history and ideals of the Olympic Movement.

Because it has a permanent home and a more than adequate funding base the IOC can address the question of legacy in a sustained and systematic fashion. The IOC also rightly recognises that its rich array of sites and symbols add to its legitimacy and appeal and are the core way in which Olympic values are spread. The sites and symbols of the Olympic Movement are powerful and compelling. The Olympic hymn, oath, flag, five rings, torch and torch relay, opening and closing ceremonies, add to the legitimacy and the transcendence of the Olympics, which draws on ancient and religious symbols. In an era where sport has become more profane and even over-exposed or where sporting officials attempt to enhance a particular event by razzle-dazzle and razzamatazz, the Olympics have credible symbols which add to the solemnity and dignity of its events.

It is a different story for Olympic organisers in cities nominated to host the Olympics. Because the time frame is so short and the demands are overwhelming, all the core efforts of the Games' authorities are directed towards the short-term goal of hosting a successful Games. The pressing nature of immediate funding and planning issues makes it difficult for any of the city organisers to think beyond the Games in any systematic fashion.

Sydney is no exception to this experience. While many members of the local Olympic Family have expressed keen interest in legacy issues, such as the creation of Olympic Museum - a Museum dedicated to the Sydney Olympics - it is a low priority issue. A common response is that the idea is a good one, but all the funds available are committed to staging the Games.

Issues relating to Olympic Legacy

Time in an Olympic city can be divided into three periods. There is the pre-Games period which can last for a decade or even two: developing a successful bid plan and then organising the Games themselves. Then there is the duration of the Games, three weekends and two weeks - a mere 16 or 17 days - which pass for most in a twinkling of an eye. The post-Games period is by far the longest; it stretches for decades after the Games. However, it is clearly the least-planned period.

One year after the Atlanta Games there was a revealing headline in the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*: "Remains of the Games: One year later, we're still looking for a legacy." The article suggested that Atlanta lacked a focal point for post-Games celebrations:

We don't even have a centrepiece for the one-year anniversary celebration. At Centennial Olympic Park, the heart and soul of the Games even after the bombing, we're still laying pipe and pushing dirt. Few of us have ventured back, and most of the park remains cordoned off by the chain-link fence.

Had the park been finished, I would have been a very strong advocate of a one-year celebration that tried to bring back the magic, we all experienced, commented Billy Payne (AJC 13/7/97).

So there were just a sprinkling of events to mark Atlanta's first anniversary. There was an exhibition of Olympic memorabilia opened at the Atlanta History Centre, a 5 km fun run, a parade, a round-the-clock showing of Bud Greenspan's official Olympic film, and a rededication of the Olympic cauldron.

Atlanta, more than many recent Olympic cities, seems to have been keen to dispose of its Olympic history and its legacy, almost to the point of denying that the Games took place there. There are no plans for more substantial legacy such as an Olympic Museum or a Centre for Olympic Studies.

Another issue to consider is: what is an Olympic city? Should it be marked by some special common elements? If the IOC has its site at Lausanne, should an Olympic city have some form of legacy to commemorate the event? And, if so, what? Or, should a city, having invested so much in the Olympics, pack up its Games' kit bag and get on with "normal" life?

Helen Wilson provides an initial starting point for a consideration of the issue:

What, then, is an Olympic city? It must, of course, have the sporting infrastructure to be able to accommodate the events, providing the technical conditions to induce personal best performances from the athletes, provide a sufficient crowd to give the sense of a mega-event, and to make good television. The main stadium should particularly signify newness and monumentality in itself. The city must have the transport and tourism infrastructure to be able to accommodate esteemed visitors and participants. It must have the communications facilities to be able to shoot, package and distribute footage and commentary instantly to the media of over 200 nations (Wilson, p. 616).

The stadium as a central monument is an interesting idea because it suggests that the main stadium should not merely be functional, it should also enhance the Olympic vision. Is a city obliged to create a core monument which will proclaim the Olympic message for the long term? The Games, Wilson adds, are about a "city as spectacle," in which television "manipulates" and "theatricalizes" urban sites. The organisers in Sydney, like the organisers of most recent Games, have paid a great deal of attention to the physical form of the city, to building and rebuilding, salvaging, cleaning up and detoxifying for the year 2000. Planners are well aware that the Olympic site is a special, even a sacred, site. One purpose of a tree-lined boulevard at Sydney's Olympic Park is to replicate the notion of a sacred grove which was part of the site at ancient Olympia.

However, landscape architect James Weirick has been critical of Olympic Park, largely on legacy grounds. He has pointed out that a "disappointing aspect" of the masterplan developed by the urban design team is that it:

... has retreated from a poetic ambition to invoke the gods of Olympia. The reconstructed hillock at the western terminus of the main axis has been named the Hill of Kronos and the masterplan report ends with an appropriate quotation from Pindar, this appears to be all that is left of a set of classical references which sought to structure the site along the lines of the sanctuary and stadium at Olympia (Weirick, 1996).

The escalating costs of staging the Games have often led to more pragmatic rather than poetic decisions. Why, then, should a city incur more costs in planning for its post-Olympic period? Or, if the purpose is to place the city on the stage for 16 days - to advertise a city's claim to be a global city - won't this be achieved at the time of the Games?

There are a number of important reasons why the issue of legacy should be approached in a more serious and systematic fashion. Some of these include:

Commemorating a peak experience: One important public issue is how to best commemorate an event that will loom large in the public imagination. For many people in a city or other parts of the country, a home Olympics will be a peak experience in their lives. There is a need for the public to re-connect with that experience after the event. Many will want to re-live the magic of the Olympic moment. "Touching" the Games is even more important for those who watched the Games on television, they will want to assure themselves that their Olympic experience was real. Post-Olympic; tourists will want to visit the site where a particular local athlete performed heroically.

Mourning the Games: After the Games are over many residents will feel a great sense of loss that the Games have come and gone and that they can no longer look forward to the Games. One year after the Games in Atlanta, volunteer Peggy Mayer felt unsatisfied and even a little depressed: "It was all over so quickly, like being in fifth gear and trying to come to a screeching halt" (AJC 13/7/97). Part of this represents a post-Olympics depression, coming back to the humdrum routine of life after the all-too brief "high" of the Olympics. The post-Olympics depression is short-term but very real problem, which should be addressed by the planners.

A sense of loss, mourning the Games, can be a longer-term problem. Once the Games are over, the city loses part of its identity, as the attention of the world media shifts to another city. Legacy is a constructive and positive way of dealing with mourning. A city has to deal with its "death" - when the Games have gone - in the same way an individual deals with the loss of a close family friend. Symbols, rituals, and memory are all part of the healing process. One constructive

way of approaching this issue is to suggest that while Sydney or some city has “lost” the Games - and they are unlikely to return in anyone’s lifetime - the memory of the Games still are alive and Sydney will forever be an Olympic city. Legacy is one way that “memory” can be reconstructed in a positive way.

The Memory of the Games: The dedication of Olympic sites and the establishment of Olympic museums is one way in which the public can “touch” the Games after the event and recapture some of the magic of the event and deal with sense of loss. The trend to establish Olympic museums is a relatively recent phenomenon, but there is considerable evidence that Olympic museums at Calgary and Barcelona have been successful, both from the point of view of attracting Olympic tourists and in enhancing Olympic education. At Calgary there is an ongoing and attractive educational program which utilises the Games’ site effectively.

There is a need, then, to develop a strategic plan for the establishment of Olympic sites in the city after the Games. Ideally each city should have an integrated plan for the location of Olympic papers, memorabilia, and displays. No city has yet constructed a one-stop research, documentation, and display stop. Barcelona’s Olympic legacy is spread over three sites: the Olympic Galleria (at the main Olympic precinct), the city library (which holds most of the Olympic papers), and the Centre for Olympic Studies, which is involved in research and documentation of the Games. If it were located at a central point in the Olympic precinct it would be a very attractive meeting-place for a great variety of Olympic visitors and researchers.

Galleries, museums, archives, and Centres for Olympic Studies, set up during, or even after the Olympic event, can enhance the Olympic precinct and provide it with a continuing life and liveliness. They all, in various ways, represent means of coming to terms with the past, questioning it, and even profiting from it.

Core Legacy: An important issue to consider is: what constitutes the core legacy? No one would suggest that all the city’s many Olympic venues should be recognised as part of legacy. So there is the practical issue to decide what should be retained in its original form, what should be modified or have a change of use, and what should be discarded, demolished or sold off. In the case of Sydney, venues within the main precinct at Olympic Park will have greater long-term significance than those on the periphery (at Penrith or Holsworthy). However, even sites which will have a complete change of use - the Olympic village will become a suburb - may be enhanced with appropriate “marking,” whether this be in terms of plaques, street names or public art.

Guardians of Legacy: Legacy beyond the Games is a daunting task because it requires a post-Olympics vision to flow out of the Olympic experience; it requires some form of co-ordinated strategy and some “guardians” of legacy who will maintain the best traditions of the city’s Olympics.

Costs: While some may look at legacy as a costly extravagance and as a distraction from the main effort, investments in legacy may provide a way of recouping some investments in the Games. There is an enduring interest in the Games after the event which re-emerges gradually - after a dramatic fall in interest at the end of the Games - over following weeks and years. Barcelona has proved that a city which plans its legacy well can reap the benefit over a number of years.

Problems of Olympic Legacy

There are a number of reasons why it is difficult for most cities to plan for life beyond the Games.

- (1) During the rush to organise the Games, there is all too little time to consider the post-Games plan. At a time when legacy comes under serious consideration, after the Games many of the important local Olympic institutions, including the local organising committee, are winding up. There is a great danger that key decisions will be made “on the run” and on an ad hoc basis.
- (2) Legacy is frequently shelved because it seems to represent a range of additional costs for budgets that are already stretched in the pre-Games period. Unfortunately, many planners fail to see that while legacy will require some additional outlay, it is a way of recouping some Olympic costs (through tourism). It is also a way of recouping some costs which have already been spent on facilities.
- (3) Legacy is often looked upon as a side issue, something that will be tackled after the Games. Because it is not seen as a central issue, few cities have well-developed post-Games plans.
- (4) The concept of an Olympic city, so far as it exists, is an implicit rather than an explicit one and is left to each city to interpret in its own way. Barcelona has made a point of preserving its Olympic precinct, whereas Atlanta’s has been largely dismantled.

- (5) Legacy is also information about how best to stage the Games. It has been customary for the organisers of the next Olympics to “look over the shoulders” of those staging a current Games. However, the bulk of Games’ “knowledge” is not passed on in any systematic way to the next Olympic city, which is left with the immense task of “reinventing the Olympic wheel.”

The Case for Olympic Legacy

Far from being a side issue, legacy is a core issue to the staging of the Games. Every city has a core set of objectives (which are usually unstated and mostly unarticulated) as to why the city should want to host the Games. For the city of Melbourne, the 1956 Games:

... may be seen as a curtain-raiser to modernist Melbourne. Between 1950 and 1970, Melbourne became ... the fastest growing capital in Australia. Perhaps more than any other Australian city it exemplified the Fordist paradigm of urban growth - high investment in manufacturing, especially of protected consumer products such as cars and electrical goods, high levels of immigration, high levels of car and home ownership and high levels of government intervention in the provision of infrastructure . . . The Games were pivotal to the process of self-definition through which the city, and especially its business and political elite, adjusted to the new paradigm (Davison, p. 65).

The General Director for Sport for the Generalitat de Catalunya outlined Barcelona’s plan to use the Olympics for the benefit of the city. He was far more explicit:

The Olympic Games permitted the transformation of the city, providing it with those services it so much needed, and the heavy investment that would otherwise have taken so many years to have come. Barcelona once again turning its face to the sea, the Olympic village, the airport, the roadways and communications, the hotel network, all of which were essential to its becoming a competitive city in the scenario of to-day’s Europe (Moragas and Botella, p. 264).

Implicit in the bid to win the right to stage the Games are many unstated promises. Given that the local community invests so much in the Games, it is important that the wider benefits of legacy should be canvassed and articulated. Too often, costs and benefits narrowly focus on economics. Legacy involves casting the gaze wider, to poetry and art, architecture, the environment, information, and many other non-tangible factors.

A Model for an Olympic City?

At very least every city should deal with the issue of legacy in a systematic fashion and develop plans for the post-Games period which will deal not only with monuments and museums but the issue of memory as well. Legacy should be integrated into the city’s master plan. Other issues which could profitably be addressed might include:

- (1) A definition of core legacy. What objects and facilities are so central to the Olympic experience that they should be retained?
- (2) Is there an appropriate model for housing of archives, memorabilia, and items of display? Is a “one- stop shop” feasible? Can it cater to the varied needs of scholars, students and tourists? Is it an appropriate venue for Olympic education?
- (3) What are the ways in which Olympic cities (and Centres) can develop stronger links with each other, to pass on in a more systematic fashion, knowledge which has been gained from the Olympic experience? How can knowledge about staging the Games best be communicated from one city to another?
- (4) Is there a case for a more global definition of an Olympic city? If so, what should this consist of?

Conclusions

Olympic cities, in a sense, are as important as the legacy developed at the Olympic headquarters of the IOC. Few citizens will have the chance to visit the IOC Museum at Lausanne. They are more likely to connect with Olympic legacy

in their own country by visiting sites and museums. Although there has been much discussion of legacy from the time of Coubertin, it remains a neglected area and one which can profit from more systematic and sustained analysis.

While this paper has argued that Olympic legacy should be taken seriously and has much to offer both a local city and the Olympic Movement as a whole, not everyone might agree with this perspective. Emory University sociologist, Alvin Boskoff suggested:

The Olympics is a temporary thing. It's like a rocket that shoots up in the sky, a big expensive rocket, and then it's gone . . . Maybe the best thing is to forget about the Olympics and go about the business of becoming a first-class city (*AJC* 13/7/97).

I think not. There are many parallels between Sydney's Olympic Park and its Opera House. There was plenty of controversy and stretched budgets on both occasions. But both were "vision" things. The big task of Sydney 2000 is to make the "vision thing" work after 2000.

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