

INTRODUCTION: MEGA-EVENTS AS URBAN GAME CHANGERS?

Marco Cremaschi²

This special issue on the urban impacts of mega-events emerged in the aftermath of the Paris Olympic Games and the 2024 AESOP conference held at Sciences Po. Following that meeting, a few contributions were revised and assembled into the present collection. The connection between the conference and the Games was explicit in the conference title, which echoed the recurrent claim that mega-events function as urban game changers. Yet this proposition has never been self-evident. A substantial body of scholarship has instead qualified the transformative role of the Games in urban development, while showing that their effects on ordinary planning procedures are often more consequential, and at times more problematic, than their celebrated material legacies.

All six papers were written after Paris 2024, with several substantially revised or completed in 2026; thereby drawing on post-event assessments rather than bid-stage projections. Paris appears in every paper, not only those directly devoted to it. It is the reference point for Delaplace's giga-event classification, the comparator for Barcelona and London in Deffner's analysis, the principal case for Bourdin *et al.* and Cremaschi, and an implicit benchmark in the Buenos Aires discussion of successful and failed Olympic urbanism.

Paris bid for the Olympic Games three times (1992, 2008, 2012) before eventually succeeding in 2024. Other cities also bid repeatedly. This persistence, documented more broadly in Deffner's contribution, raises a central question: why do cities continue bidding despite well-known risks? Across the collection, the answer appears less economic than political and symbolic. Mega-events promise, for different reasons, global visibility, civic identity consolidation, and political legitimation for hosting countries and local urban coalitions. These aspirations adapt swiftly to diverse political environments and accommodate different rationales. In Paris, the strategy under Mayor Bertrand Delanoë was explicitly tied to metropolitan rebalancing; the 2024 revision under Mayor Anne Hidalgo adapted to a wider territorial focus including neighbouring Seine-Saint-Denis. The sustainability narrative was subsequently layered into this agenda as both international positioning and political justification.

Other cases illustrate contrasting trajectories. Athens mobilised the Games for national affirmation rather than metropolitan redistribution, producing spectacular infrastructure but weak legacy planning and a debt burden that was later associated with sovereign crisis. Milan adopted a minimum-intervention strategy, using the Games primarily to accelerate already-planned private developments. Buenos Aires pursued a socially progressive model by directing investment toward its most vulnerable territory, yet lacked the institutional capacity required to consolidate those gains.

Taken together, the collection suggests that Paris 2024 represents the most sophisticated iteration of mega-event urbanism to date, not because it resolved the tensions that exist between sustainability and equity, but because it managed to contain them long enough to deliver the event while securing metropolitan transport investments likely to outlast it. Whether the social legacy of the Seine-Saint-Denis Village proves durable or is overtaken by gentrification remains an open question that none of the papers can yet conclusively answer.

² Sciences Po, Paris
marco.cremaschi@sciencespo.fr

Delaplace's introductory Outlook, an invited piece written for the Journal, for example, revises the total public cost of Paris 2024 by demonstrating that the organising committee's figures excluded security, transport, and mobilisation expenditures. This is not a marginal correction. It significantly alters the cost ratio and directly challenges the Agenda 2020 narrative of fiscal restraint. Such post hoc accounting has often been absent from the field, and its availability here grounds theoretical claims in a way pre-event scholarship rarely could.

Paris 2024 nevertheless adopted a diffused spatial model: 95 per cent of venues were existing or temporary, distributed across the Grand Paris metropolitan area, while permanent construction was concentrated in Seine-Saint-Denis. The Saint-Denis Olympic Village, spanning 52 hectares across Saint-Denis, Saint-Ouen, and Île-Saint-Denis, serves both as an emblem and a test case of the sustainability agenda. Designed for 14,000 athletes, it is now being converted into a mixed-use district comprising approximately 2,200 housing units, offices, and schools, with half the housing designated social or affordable.

Two Structural Paradoxes

The unifying concern of this special issue is the urban consequences of mega-events viewed through two recurring structural paradoxes.

The first is scalar. The costs of hosting the Olympic Games are typically borne at national level: without state guarantees and TV broadcasting fees, such events would be not feasible. In contrast, their direct and indirect effects, positive or negative, are experienced primarily at local level. Benefits are usually framed in terms of infrastructure, regeneration, or housing, particularly through Olympic Villages and their residential afterlives. Yet the mismatch between centralised costs and localised impacts remains a persistent feature of mega-event governance.

The second paradox concerns the exceptionalism of decision-making. Although mega-events are planned many years in advance and often benefit from extraordinary resources, ordinary planning procedures are repeatedly deemed

insufficient. Special legal regimes, accelerated approvals, ad hoc governance arrangements, and derogatory planning instruments are introduced in the name of urgency or efficiency. Thus, even where time and money are abundant, exceptional rules continue to prevail. This tension between long preparation cycles and procedural exceptionalism helps explain why mega-events remain fertile terrain for urban research.

The papers collected here engage directly with these two dimensions, scalar asymmetries and exceptional governance, while also emphasising comparison. Rather than focusing on a single case, the issue uses the conjuncture created by Paris 2024 and the AESOP conference to contrast the celebrative narrative surrounding recent European Olympics with more contested experiences elsewhere. These include Athens, often cast as the negative mirror image of Paris in legacy debates, and transatlantic perspectives comparing Olympic village developments with large-scale event districts in Buenos Aires. Collectively, the articles demonstrate that mega-events are not merely spectacles or temporary interruptions of urban life. They are moments in which broader dynamics of state intervention, territorial redistribution, planning exceptionalism, and urban transformation become unusually visible.

In the preceding thirty years, studies of mega-events and their effects on urban areas have evolved into a multidisciplinary domain encompassing urban planning, geography, sports studies, and management. A synthesis of extant literature reveals several major trends. The primary concern pertains to the classification and scale of the data. Müller's (2015) seminal framework remains pivotal in defining mega-events through metrics such as cost, media reach, and visitor numbers, while recent contributions have refined these indicators to better capture urban pressures and population presence. A secondary trend is centred on fiscal risk, with substantial evidence demonstrating recurrent cost overruns, optimistic forecasting, and uncertain economic returns. A third strand of research examines legacy, moving from celebratory narratives toward more critical approaches that distinguish between tangible and intangible, positive and negative, and legacies perceived differently depending on the actors involved and the timing of events (Leopkey & Parent, 2012; Chappelet, 2012; Preuss, 2019).

A fourth line of research analyses opposition, securitisation, and reform, documenting bid withdrawals, anti-Games mobilisations, and the rise of surveillance-oriented governance, including AI-based monitoring. Across this literature, reforms such as Olympic Agenda 2020 are often perceived as tempering excesses without effecting fundamental alterations to the underlying political economy of Olympic urbanism.

Finally, research into governance and planning processes draws on collaborative planning, project governance, and 'projectification' theory to explain how mega-events coordinate heterogeneous actors under severe time constraints. Recent studies on sustainability suggest that, while newer Games have reduced some material impacts, social and territorial inequalities remain unresolved. Extant literature indicates a tendency towards a shift in the form of Olympic urbanism rather than in its underlying logic.

The collection demonstrates the limits of universal models. Neither Agenda 2020 nor sustainability discourse can override the effects of institutional capacity, planning culture, and urban political economy. Similar Olympic frameworks produce sharply different outcomes in Paris, Milan, Athens, and Buenos Aires because they are mediated through distinct territorial systems. The papers assembled here move beyond the binary language of success and failure and shift attention from outcomes alone to mechanisms: how actors are coordinated through time, how territorial priorities are selected, how governance is distributed across scales, and how legacy is politically constructed.

Presentation of the Papers

Delaplace's opening piece offers a conceptual and empirical framework for understanding the scale, costs, and governance challenges of contemporary mega-events, using Paris 2024 as its primary reference. It opens by revisiting Müller's (2015) four-criteria classification matrix — visitor numbers, media coverage, organisational cost, and capital investment — and proposes a refinement that replaces ticket sales with total population present; a more operationally relevant measure for urban management. Applying this updated matrix, the paper argues that Paris 2024, with a total estimated cost of approximately €13 billion (of which 42 per cent was publicly funded) and 11.2 million people present during the Games, qualifies as a *giga-event* rather than simply a mega-event, matching London 2012 on this revised scale. The analytical core is organised around three structural challenges facing contemporary mega-event governance. The first is sustainability, treated as a persistent tension: Paris 2024 committed to reducing carbon emissions by 55 per cent compared to London 2012. This was achieved primarily by limiting new construction to 5 per cent of total venues, but international travel by spectators and athletes remains structurally incompatible with genuine carbon neutrality. The paper critically examines claims of sustainability, arguing that they are largely dependent on offsetting mechanisms of doubtful validity. The second challenge is the management of uncertainty in environments where the rationality of action is necessarily limited. The third, and perhaps most analytically rich, concerns the growing *opposition* to mega-events: bid withdrawals driven by referenda or political resistance, the NOlympics movement, controversies over AI-powered surveillance systems trialled during Paris 2024, displacement of populations, and the contested nature of the concept of legacy itself. The paper situates legacy as a political instrument mobilised by event promoters to pre-empt opposition, and notes that what constitutes a legacy is inherently contested among local populations, urban regimes, and the IOC. The conclusion calls for earlier and more genuine civic participation in bid decisions, without which future mega-events will remain increasingly vulnerable to organised opposition.

Bourdin *et al's* paper makes an original methodological and theoretical contribution to urban project management research by focusing on temporality as the central analytical dimension, using the Paris 2024 Olympic Games as an extreme case. The central argument challenges the common *ex post* interpretation that the Games' successful delivery was simply the product of a non-negotiable deadline; instead, the paper demonstrates that temporal coordination, the alignment of heterogeneous temporal frameworks across dozens of actors, was actively produced through specific management instruments and was far from given in advance. The methodological contribution is the development of the "timeline" tool: a comprehensive chronological map of the Olympic project, constructed from 62 semi-structured interviews conducted across the full production system (SOLIDEO, Paris 2024 organising committee, national ministries, local authorities, private developers, architecture firms) between 2020 and 2025, supplemented by legislative, regulatory, and press documentation. The paper describes the timeline's four reading modes (global, horizontal, vertical,

and nodal), with each revealing different dimensions of how temporal coordination is built and breaks down. The nodal reading is particularly revealing: the timeline is not uniformly dense but structured around moments of heightened activity (the IOC's designation of Paris in 2017, the Olympic Law of 2018, the post-COVID acceleration from 2021) that concentrate interactions, decisions, and critical adjustments. The paper also explores the fragmentation of the Olympic project under Agenda 2020 (36 competition sites, 70 facilities managed by SOLIDEO), and argues that this spatial dispersion created a qualitatively new form of managerial complexity, which is centred less on engineering and construction and more on urban planning coordination and political negotiation. The conclusion contributes to mid-range planning theory by conceptualising the urban project as a mechanism for progressively building shared frames of reference and temporal alignment in conditions of deep uncertainty; a process that cannot be reduced to deadline imposition, however fixed and consequential that deadline may be.

Deffner's paper revisits the Athens 2004 Olympics two decades on, situating the case within a broader comparative framework that also draws on Munich 1972, Barcelona 1992, London 2012, and Paris 2024. Its central preoccupation is whether the positive assessments of mega-events in urban studies have systematically outweighed critical analyses, and whether sport mega-events function primarily as agents of urban progress or as vehicles for mismanagement. Written with explicit auto-critical awareness: the author revisits a prediction made in 2002 that Athens's ambition to use the Games as a "springboard for qualitative development" looked "hypothetical" even before the opening ceremony, the paper is notable for its intellectual honesty. The theoretical framing draws on Geoffrey West's work on scale to interrogate whether city size systematically determines hosting success. The data are striking: of the 16 cities that have bid more than twice since 1992, only six have won, and among smaller cities (under 5 million inhabitants), only Athens and Brisbane have ever been awarded the Games. Size, the author concludes, largely determines hosting capacity. The paper then applies Flyvbjerg and Gardner's principles of large-scale project management (think slow, act fast, avoid the commitment fallacy, think from right to left) to evaluate the Athens case. Athens is assessed against multiple legacy dimensions: sporting (significant investment in national sports infrastructure, partial success), social (limited; persistent inequalities of access), urban (new metropolitan infrastructure including the Attiki Odos ring road and the airport, genuinely transformative), and economic (largely negative; the Games accelerated debt accumulation, with no measurable tourism premium for Greece as a whole, though Volos and its regional airport represent a partial exception). The post-Games fate of venues is documented in granular detail, with most facilities either underused, deteriorated, or repurposed only partially. The paper closes by advocating integrated legacy planning, scalable design processes, and a city-branding strategy that embeds civic pride and quality of life as core objectives, rather than treating the Games as a one-off event-marketing exercise.

Jreij *et al's* paper provides the most systematic comparative analysis in the collection, examining how the IOC's Agenda 2020 reforms (introduced 2014, updated 2021) have reshaped the spatial and environmental dimensions of Olympic planning through the cases of Paris 2024 (Summer Games) and Milano Cortina 2026 (Winter Games) — the first two games to be fully designed under this framework from the bidding stage onwards. The paper develops four analytical dimensions — spatial configuration, governance structure, sustainability strategy, and legacy projection — and applies them to both cases, generating a comparative synthesis table. The paper notes the contradictions between the green narrative and local realities: displacement of vulnerable populations, speculative land pressure, and limited municipal participation in governance. Milano Cortina 2026 adopted a constellation model: venues spread over 400 kms across four clusters (Milan, Cortina d'Ampezzo, Valtellina, Val di Fiemme), the most territorially dispersed Winter Games in history. The Porta Romana Olympic Village in Milan will convert post-Games into student housing; raising immediate questions about affordability. Across the Alpine clusters, decisions to rebuild the Cortina bobsleigh track and to derogate environmental assessment procedures expose the tension that exists between sustainability rhetoric and institutional shortcuts. The paper's overarching conclusion is that Agenda 2020 has succeeded in reducing material excess but not in ensuring territorial justice or environmental coherence, and that it systematically privileges well-equipped metropolitan regions with existing governance capacity; thereby reinforcing rather than correcting spatial inequalities in Olympic hosting.

Tomé *et al's* paper examines the 2018 Youth Olympic Games in Buenos Aires, focusing on the Barrio Olímpico built in the city's historically underinvested southern area. It situates this case within a long genealogy of failed or fragmented planning interventions for the south of Buenos Aires, from the Almirante Brown Park Plan in the 1960s through the various post-1990 urban plans and asks whether the Youth Olympics offered

a genuine catalyst for reversing this pattern of spatial inequality or merely added another layer of sporadic intervention. Existing literature on mega-events in the Global South has focused predominantly on Summer Games or World Cups in contexts of significant state power and geopolitical assertion. The Youth Olympics in Buenos Aires is an analytically distinct case: a secondary-tier event used by a city with no plausible claim to global mega-event status, held in its most disadvantaged territory, with a redistributive social intent that the primary literature does not associate with Olympic urbanism. The empirical portrait of Commune Eight is detailed and sobering: the lowest population density and property values in the city, the highest proportion of informal dwellings, the worst connectivity, the most fragmented green space governance, and poverty rates three times higher than the city centre. The paper analyses the infrastructure investments triggered by the Games (the Metrobus Sur, the Olympic Bridge over the Riachuelo, the sports complex and 1,370 housing units) and evaluates their actual post-event impact through community surveys, spatial analysis, and census data. The findings are mixed. The affordable housing programme (UVA mortgage loans tied to the inflation-indexed purchasing value unit) was reasonably successful in providing access to middle-income families, whilst the socio-urban integration of Villa 20 (renamed Barrio 20 - Papa Francisco), where 1,665 units were built through participatory planning, is assessed as having been a genuine achievement. However, 205 plots in the Olympic Village remain undeveloped seven years after the Games; sports facilities are largely inaccessible to the public; connectivity remains deeply deficient; and the surrounding land uses are still incompatible with a stable residential neighbourhood. The paper's analytical contribution is the concept of a new vision for the southern area, a comprehensive development plan, developed 2022–2025, that attempts to reframe the Barrio Olímpico not as a legacy monument but as a node within a metropolitan-scale territorial strategy. This re-framing, the authors argue, is a prerequisite for capitalising on the investments already made.

Cremschi's paper analyses the structural duality at the heart of French urban planning: the coexistence of a centralised statutory regulatory framework with flexible, design-driven, project-based practices. Taking the Paris 2024 Olympic Games and the new *Plan Local d'Urbanisme bioclimatique* (PLUb) as dual empirical anchors, the paper traces the evolution of French planning through three historical ages (postwar Fordist centralism, 1980s decentralisation and entrepreneurialism, and the post-2010 ecological imperative) before arguing that this evolution has produced a system characterised by what it calls a 'double bind': planning is simultaneously too centralised to allow genuine local adaptation, and too fragmented to ensure territorial coherence. The paper analyses the ZAC (*Zone d'Aménagement Concerté*) instrument in depth, identifying it as the primary mechanism through which statutory planning and project delivery are institutionally separated in France. This separation, the paper argues, enables flexibility and negotiation, but also constrains ecological ambition, limits democratic accountability, and generates a proliferation of planning tools that obscures rather than clarifies responsibility. The emergence of the *projet urbain* since the 1980s is analysed as a partial corrective to regulatory planning's rigidity, but its integration into statutory frameworks remains unresolved. The paper then examines tactical urbanism (temporary uses, community gardens, co-production experiments) as a third layer of practice, noting both its innovative potential and its risk of serving as cover for market-driven transformation. The theoretical conclusion, drawing on Bernardo Secchi and Sciences Po's political approach to planning, advocates for what the author calls 'strategic incrementalism': a combination of binding ecological and social regulatory frameworks with context-sensitive, politically literate project-based implementation. The Paris 2024 Olympic Village in Saint-Denis is offered as an illustration of both the system's capacity for coordination under pressure and its limitations in terms of social equity and democratic participation.

The game rhetoric

The most productive comparative thread running through the collection is the persistent disjunction between the rhetoric of legacy and its territorial reality. Deffner's Athens paper documents this at its starkest: twenty years after 2004, most Olympic venues are underused or deteriorated, and the Games accelerated fiscal crisis rather than generating a sustainable urban dividend. The Buenos Aires paper adds a different register: a city that used the Youth Olympics not for global prestige but for targeted neighbourhood upgrading in its most marginalised commune and still faces the challenge of translating fragmented investment into coherent urban transformation. The spatial planning paper on Paris and Milan shows that even under the reformed Agenda 2020 framework, which explicitly prioritises existing infrastructure and legacy planning, the conversion of Olympic Villages into affordable housing remains contested, affordability is not guaranteed, and gentrification risks in already vulnerable territories (Seine-Saint-Denis, the districts surrounding Porta Romana) are documented by multiple authors across the collection.

What distinguishes Athens from Buenos Aires is scale and ambition: Athens produced genuine metropolitan infrastructure (ring road, airport, metro extensions) but at unsustainable fiscal cost. Buenos Aires produced more modest infrastructure at community scale, with more realistic social targeting, but the territorial impact remains limited. Paris 2024, positioned between these extremes, inherits the tension: grand sustainability claims, significant transport investment (Line 14 extensions, Grand Paris Express acceleration), but unresolved questions about displacement and gentrification that Delaplace and Cremaschi identify as structurally embedded in the ZAC financial model and in the exceptional planning regime that mega-events impose.

Milan offers a further variation: a city that, having absorbed the lessons of Expo 2015's difficult post-event transformation, deliberately chose a minimalist, market-led approach to the Olympics. The result, the spatial planning paper notes, is that sustainability is reduced to infrastructural efficiency, while social equity and affordability at Porta Romana remain largely unaddressed.

The collection therefore suggests that Agenda 2020 has successfully changed the form of Olympic urbanism—less new construction, more reuse, greater dispersal—without fundamentally altering its political economy, still characterised by land valorisation, selective redistribution, and unequal territorial effects.

Olympic Villages

Three papers in the collection specifically examine Olympic Villages as an urban planning intervention: the Buenos Aires paper, the Delaplace spatial planning comparison, and the Bourdin *et al.* temporality paper. Placing them in dialogue reveals a typology of village models with distinct spatial logics, social ambitions, and post-event trajectories.

The Buenos Aires Barrio Olímpico is the only case in the collection built in a genuinely disadvantaged peripheral urban territory, with an explicit social mandate (50 per cent of units allocated to long-term residents of the southern communes) and an affordable mortgage mechanism. Its limitations are equally specific: post-event stagnation, poor connectivity, underutilised sports facilities, and inadequate integration with the surrounding urban fabric. The model is one of targeted social investment that lacks the metropolitan leverage needed to convert isolated intervention into systemic transformation.

The Saint-Denis Olympic Village is the most extensively analysed case. It operates at a completely different scale (52 hectares, 14,000 athletes), within a global sustainability narrative, in a territory that is simultaneously deprived and adjacent to some of the densest metropolitan infrastructure investment in Europe. Its post-Games programme (2,200 housing units (half social or affordable), schools, offices) is more socially ambitious than any previous Olympic Village, but the Bourdin *et al.* paper reveals the extraordinary temporal and organisational complexity required to deliver it, and the spatial planning paper notes that gentrification risks in Seine-Saint-Denis are real and not addressed by the current planning framework.

Porta Romana is the most financialised of the three: a brownfield redevelopment embedded in a private-led masterplan involving luxury real estate partners (Prada Holding, Covivio), where the Olympic Village will be converted to student housing at market or near-market rents. The sustainability case rests on brownfield reuse alone. This comparison exposes a gradient from redistributive (Buenos Aires) through ambivalent (Saint-Denis) to financialised (Porta Romana), a gradient that maps closely onto each city's planning culture, governance capacity, and political economy, rather than onto the IOC's sustainability framework.

Together, these cases reveal a continuum from redistributive to ambivalent to market-led village urbanism, shaped less by IOC doctrine than by local planning systems and political economies.

A Critical Assessment

The first contribution concerns the classification of Paris 2024 as a *giga-event* rather than a mega-event, proposed by Delaplace through the revision of Müller's matrix. This is not merely terminological. The collection

does not fully develop this reclassification into a research programme, but it opens a productive line of inquiry.

The second contribution is methodological, and it is the most original in a strict disciplinary sense. Bourdin *et al.*'s development of the project timeline as a research instrument for analysing temporal coordination in mega-project delivery represents a genuine innovation in the sociology and management of urban projects. The field has frameworks for analysing project *outcomes* (legacy, cost overrun, venue reuse) but remarkably little on the *process* through which heterogeneous actors are aligned across time. This methodological approach could be profitably applied to non-Olympic urban mega-projects, and its explicit connection to Midler's clinical management tradition (1995) provides it with theoretical anchoring that previous planning-process accounts of Olympic delivery have lacked.

The third contribution is comparative, and it reshapes how the relationship between Agenda 2020 and planning systems is understood. Existent literature on Agenda 2020 has focused primarily on the IOC's intentions and the bid documents that respond to them. Jreij *et al.*'s find that Agenda 2020 prescriptions generate outcomes that depend less on the IOC's recommendations than on the pre-existing governance capacity, planning tools, and socio-economic contexts of host territories.

Thereafter, Cremaschi's accounts the cost of the French flexibility model: the concentration of distributional choices in a technico-legal instrument insulated from democratic participation, the structural bias toward intermediate programme categories that reduces social ambition, and the proliferation of planning tools that obscures rather than clarifies accountability. This is an endogenous critique of the French planning system as it specifically operates under mega-event pressure, and it connects the empirical Olympic literature to broader comparative planning theory debates around the relationship that exists between regulatory frameworks, project-based delivery, and democratic governance.

Planning Systems Under Pressure

The collection also shows that the decisive variable in Olympic outcomes may not be event scale or IOC reform, but the character of national and local planning systems, as shown by Cremaschi's 'double bind' paper on French planning and the Bourdin *et al.* temporality paper. But the planning system question is latent in all the others. The ZAC instrument in France provides flexibility and public control over land but institutionalises a separation between statutory regulation and project delivery that limits ecological ambition, and concentrates distributional choices in techno-legal instruments insulated from democratic participation. Bourdin *et al.* show how this system, under Olympic pressure, produces extraordinary coordination capacity but at the cost of local participation: SOLIDEO's centralised management enabled delivery, but municipalities like Saint-Denis were "primarily in a consultative capacity rather than functioning as principal decision-makers" (Bourdin *et al.*).

Milan offers the counterpart: a polycentric governance arrangement through the Fondazione Milano Cortina that distributes authority across regions, provinces, municipalities, and national bodies, but generates fragmentation and accountability gaps. Environmental assessments were derogated; legacy planning beyond individual venues was postponed; the bobsleigh track decision was driven by local prestige politics rather than sustainability. The planning system's decentralisation, rather than enabling local responsiveness, enabled local capture of the planning process by specific interests.

Buenos Aires presents the Global South variant: a planning history marked by imported planning models inadequately adapted to local conditions, and an institutional fragmentation that required extraordinary political alignment (between local, provincial, and national governments in 2015) to achieve even the modest coordination that the Youth Olympics produced. Athens represents the fourth variant: a planning system mobilised by state sanction to deliver major infrastructure on time. However, it lacks the institutional capacity to manage post-event reconversion, resulting in the 'white elephant' phenomenon that Agenda 2020 was designed to prevent.

The collection suggests that the most important variable determining Olympic urban outcomes is neither the IOC's sustainability framework, nor the form of spatial configuration (compact, diffused, or constellation),

but the quality and political character of the host planning system and its capacity to integrate exceptional project delivery with long-term statutory planning, to protect against financialised capture, and maintain democratic accountability over distributional choices. The central issue, therefore, is whether planning systems can reconcile exceptional project delivery with long-term statutory planning, democratic accountability, and socially equitable distribution.

References

- Bourdin, A., Dang Vu, H., Idris, J. (2026). Managing the temporal complexity of urban projects: The case of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. *AESOP Transactions*, 10(1).
- Chappelet, J.-L. (2012). Mega sporting event legacies: A multifaceted concept. *Papeles de Europa*, 25, 76–86. https://doi.org/10.5209/rev_PADE.2012.n25.41096
- Cremonesi, M. (2026). French double bind: Reconciling planning and project. *AESOP Transactions*, 10(1).
- Deffner, A. (2026). The Olympic city after the games: Dilemmas of urban transformation 20 years after Athens 2004. *AESOP Transactions*, 10(1).
- Delaplace, M. (2026). Editorial: Megaevents. *AESOP Transactions*, 10(1).
- Jreij, A., et al. (2026). Spatial planning and sustainability in the application of the Olympic Agenda 2020: A comparative analysis of Paris 2024 and Milano Cortina 2026. *AESOP Transactions*, 10(1).
- Leopkey, B., & Parent, M. M. (2012). Olympic Games legacy: From general benefits to sustainable long-term legacy. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 29(6), 924–943. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2011.623006>
- Midler, C. (1995). "Projectification" of the firm: The Renault case. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 11(4), 363–375. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0956-5221\(95\)00035-T](https://doi.org/10.1016/0956-5221(95)00035-T)
- Müller, M. (2015). What makes an event a mega-event? Definitions and sizes. *Leisure Studies*, 34(6), 627–642. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2014.993333>
- Preuss, H. (2019). Event legacy framework and measurement. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 11(1), 103–118. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2018.1490336>
- Tomé et al. (n.d.). *The Olympic Village as a catalyst for urban transformation in the south of Buenos Aires*.