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*Sustainable Urban Development and Mega-Events: the
Impacts of Olympic Agenda 2020 in Future Olympic
Legacies*

Since its modern revival, the Olympic Games have grown to become the largest sports event in the world. As such, its organisation is highly complex, yet holding a huge potential to catalyse urban and economic development in host cities and leave lasting legacies for their communities. But past editions of the Games resulted in very different legacy outcomes. As so, the theory of using high public investments to host the Games and create long-term legacies has been contested due to some editions' expenditures, social and environmental impacts, and post-Olympic use of venues.

Public concerns about the event gained special relevance throughout the beginning of the new millennium, as globalisation and innovation drove changes in the nowadays modern, diverse, and digital society, increasingly aware of sustainability problems. As so, communities of bidding cities started contesting the decisions of their political leaders, raising the question if they have correctly defined what is of public interest. Consequently, public opposition gained force and global anti-Olympic protest movements rose, constituting a core resistance to the pro-Games growth coalitions in bidding cities. From the bid period for the 2020 Games to the bid period for the 2024 Games, nine cities withdraw their bids due to local protests or lack of political support, leaving very few candidates for such editions.

Committed to continuing increasing the sustainability of the event, the IOC developed and adopted Olympic Agenda 2020, the latest strategy of the organisation to restore the cities' willingness in bidding to host the event. Olympic Agenda 2020 is a strategic document consisting of 40 recommendations that address nowadays overarching topics of sustainability, credibility, and youth, with a view to, among other goals, enhance the sustainability of the Games, namely through changes in requirements and practices that affect mega-event urban planning. Paris 2024 and Milan-Cortina 2026 will be the first Summer and Winter Games to fully benefit from the Agenda. These editions are making use of Olympic Agenda 2020 to drive innovative changes and contributions to the sustainability of the event, namely by increasing its flexibility to adapt to the characteristics of the hosts, especially by decreasing the number of constructions needed.

This research project is based on the hypothesis that, being ambitious and innovative, the urban-related measures introduced by Olympic Agenda 2020 are not easy to implement in practice and that, along the preparations for the Paris 2024 and Milan-Cortina 2026 Olympic Games, difficulties are emerging that can compromise the goals set by the IOC. The objective is to frame the preparations for these two editions within the IOC goals and identify any inefficiencies or gaps of the Agenda to develop new recommendations that address them, contributing to continue enhancing the urban sustainability of the event. The three methodological parts of this research aim to answer the following research questions: (i) What are the urban-related objectives of the Agenda and how are they supposed to be implemented? (ii) What situations occurring during the preparations for the Paris 2024 and Milan-Cortina 2026 Olympic Games are compromising the achievement of these objectives and why? (iii) How can these situations be addressed and mitigated to prevent that they

happen again in future editions of the Games? To answer these questions, this research follows a policy making approach positioned in the point of view of the IOC as the owner of the Olympic Games, exploring possible courses of action that are within the organisation's reach.

Each of the three methodological parts have their specific objectives, methods and results. Part I systematises Reforms that are representative of the strategies adopted by the IOC to implement Olympic Agenda 2020. They gather various objectives, measures, strategies, etc, of the different IOC policies that are intended to address a certain issue. They were grouped within 5 urban-related Objectives, which are generic goals within distinct approaches that were considered as being the broad action fields where the IOC is acting in order to implement the Agenda.

Part II compares the identified Reforms with the case studies of Paris 2024 and Milan-Cortina 2026 to, first, develop a research agenda addressing situations within these case studies that seem misaligned with the objectives of the Agenda and, second, find the reasons behind such misalignment to identify the Agenda's Glitches. It initially resorts to exploratory research regarding the preparations for these case studies, using the Reforms to formulate questions addressing certain issues of the Games' preparations to be further explored and validated. Then, confirmatory research resorting to field visits and interviews serve to carry out the previously defined research agenda and use the answers to the questions, as well as the decision-making underlying each of the associated situations, to identify the Agenda's Glitches. These 10 Glitches identify some of the most relevant issues that compromise the urban sustainability of the event.

Part III consists of policy-making through research by design. It aims at developing new Recommendations that can, potentially, contribute to mitigate the identified Glitches and help improving the effects of Olympic Agenda 2020, consequently enhancing the urban sustainability of the Olympic Games. These 6 Recommendations relate to aspects of the Games that directly or indirectly affect urban planning, like the definition of the Olympic Programme, the participant's experience criteria, the mitigation of planning risks, the relation with politics, and the engagement with communities.

Results show that there is still a long journey to go to ensure that the Games are considered and perceived as sustainable. In that regard, local processes of planning and matters of urban governance appear as the main issues compromising the goals of Olympic Agenda 2020 and continuing to raise public opposition against the Games.

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