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December 2024

Lighting the Cauldron:

Leveraging the Olympic Games to Promote
Urban Resilience

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01 Introduction



The Los Angeles '84 Olympic Stadium

Image source: [Tony Duffy/Allsport/Getty Images](#)

In July of 2028, the world of professional sports will converge on Los Angeles as it hosts its second ever Olympics and the world's 56th since the modern Games began in 1896.

Originally an Ancient Greek sporting event replete with athletes competing naked and bathed in oil the modern Olympics have taken on a form, and appeal, of its own (International Olympic Committee).

In the past half century in particular, the Olympics have exploded into a show-stopping international affair that, at its most recent iteration in Paris, included nearly 11,000 athletes from 184 countries (CBS News, 2024), attracted 11 million visitors (City of Paris), and cost a staggering \$10 billion: a bargain compared to the \$30 billion Sochi Olympic Games in 2014 (Council on Foreign Relations).

Cities across the globe have historically coveted the elusive Olympic bid, viewing

hosting the Games as an opportunity to spur local economies, bolster general infrastructure, announce oneself on the world stage, and inspire civic, or national, pride (Baade & Matheson, 2016).

The 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles, arguably the most successful in history and among the first to turn a meaningful profit (Council on Foreign Relations), ushered in a golden era of Olympic bidding, with cities in the late 90s and early 2000s clamoring for an opportunity to host, spending in some cases tens of millions of dollars just to put together a competitive application (Baade & Matheson, 2016, 203).

In 2004, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) received a record-breaking 11 bids, ultimately awarding the Games to Athens (Associated Press, 1996). Two decades later, three of the past five cycles have received just one bid each: Paris (2024), Los Angeles (2028), and Brisbane (2032). Before that, during the bidding process for the 2022 Winter Olympics, resident opposition to the Games forced five applicants to withdraw (Matheson & Zimbalist, 2021).

How can we reconcile this seemingly seismic shift? Indeed, the results of past Olympics—plagued by exorbitant costs, meager revenue, and low tourist numbers—cast a shadow on the prospect of hosting the competition.

The 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, for example, cost the government roughly \$13 billion, but generated only \$9 billion, with the IOC keeping a large portion. In 2008, millions of Beijing residents were displaced from their homes to accommodate construction projects associated with the Olympic Games (Matheson & Zimbalist, 2021). Ten years after the games, most of the venues that necessitated this displacement had been abandoned (Street, 2018).

According to economists Victor Matheson and Andrew Zimbalist, lack of interest in hosting the Olympics in recent decades is indicative of a “cycle of strong competitive bidding,” whereby crippling costs lead to lower demand, which then allows prospective hosts to secure bids at a bargain (Matheson & Zimbalist, 2021). This, in turn, causes future demand to skyrocket, and so on. The record-breaking 1984 Los Angeles games followed a decade of Olympic debacles: a terrorist attack against Israeli athletes derailed Munich ‘72 (Doubek, 2022) and a financial catastrophe sunk Montreal ‘76 (Todd, 2016).

So why host the Games if they wreak such havoc? Despite the Olympics’ oft-reported failures, they have the ability to bolster cities’ urban resilience and spur crucial growth. The Rio Olympics led to substantial improvements in the city’s public transit infrastructure, despite its other challenges (Lindau & Felin, 2016). Decades after the Atlanta Games of 1996, many of its Olympic venues are not, in the case of Beijing, blighted, but are instead “thriving” (Green, 2021).



The Olympic Rings in front of the Eiffel Tower in Paris

Image source: [AFP Getty Images](#)

Sydney ‘00 saw the cleaning of 160 hectares of waterways and 180 hectares of industrial wasteland city-wide (3BL Media, 2020).

Los Angeles ‘28, and Milan ‘26 before it, find us in a similar position as Los Angeles ‘84. After a period of lackluster participation in the Olympic bidding process, the Los Angeles Olympic Games has the opportunity to, once again, “[save] the dying Olympics” (Carpenter, 2024). Or, at the very least, it has the power to help address the City’s housing crisis, improve mobility infrastructure, and promote environmental and climate resilience.

In what follows, I highlight four case studies—Los Angeles ‘84, Barcelona ‘92, Atlanta ‘96, and Sydney ‘00—that, while by no means perfect, demonstrate the Games’ ability to foster urban resilience.

In the words of historian J.A. Mangan, Olympic legacies “can be benign or malign [...] intended or unintended” (Llewellyn, Gleaves, & Wilson, 1). With these case studies as guiding lights, Los Angeles ‘28 has the opportunity to define its own legacy, and be proud of it.

02 Models of Olympic Success

According to the Resilient Cities Network, an international organization that supports the growth of equitable cities, urban resilience refers to the “capacity of a city’s systems, businesses, institutions, communities, and individuals to survive, adapt, and thrive, no matter what chronic stresses and acute shocks they experience” (Resilient Cities Network).

This section introduces four past Olympic Games, each with its own overarching mission. These Games fostered urban resilience, transforming their respective city’s by prioritizing some combination of urban regeneration, economic sustainability, social cohesion, green infrastructure, and mobility improvements.

Los Angeles

Uniting a Sprawling City

The Olympics were a critical opportunity for the infamously sprawling city of Los Angeles, whose population had tripled since its last Olympics in 1932, to foster unity and interconnectedness, linking Angelenos both to one another and their rapidly growing metropolis.

Barcelona

Humanizing the Urban Core

Staged just a decade after the first democratic elections in Spain since General Franco’s reign, the Barcelona Olympics were about modernizing and humanizing its urban core, making the city more pleasant, livable, and attractive for residents and tourists alike.

Atlanta

Uplifting an Underdog City

A city virtually unknown on the world stage, Atlanta leveraged the Olympics to inspire an impressive reimagining of its city that announced the American South as an international force to be reckoned with.

Sydney

Repurposing the Industrial Past

The 2000 Olympics provided Sydney with an opportunity to clean up and repurpose the toxic remnants of its industrial past, refashioning the city into a green, livable, and attractive hotspot in an ever-globalizing world.



Sydney Olympic Park [Image source: Olympic Park Authority](#).

CASE STUDY #1

Los Angeles '84

The Los Angeles Olympic Games of 1984 came at a pivotal turning point in world history. The Cold War between the United States and Soviet Union had reached new heights, with both nations boycotting one another's Games (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill). Stateside, America was in the throes of Reaganomics and a renewed emphasis on military spending (Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum), with the Cold War defense industry headquartered in Southern California (Leibowitz, 2014).

In Los Angeles, a slew of crises plagued the burgeoning metropolis: with economic inequality, growing urban sprawl, over-policing, and racial tensions contributing to a general malaise, and a sense that the city lacked "civic cohesion" (Morgan, 2021).

The Olympics would inspire unity, cohesion, and growth.

Economic Sustainability

Frightened by the financial disaster of Montreal '76, Angelenos passed a referendum outlawing the use of public dollars to fund the Games (Hunter, 2016). In response, the Los Angeles Olympic Committee, headed by the brilliant sports and business executive Peter Uberroth, devised a revolutionary funding model: relying almost exclusively on private dollars from large corporate sponsorships (Llewellyn, Gleaves, & Wilson, 1).

Uberroth leveraged highly lucrative sponsorships with the likes of ABC—to whom exclusive broadcasting rights were sold for \$225 million (Hunter, 2016)—Coca-Cola, FujiFilm, and McDonald's (Morgan, 2021).

What's more, the Olympic Committee saved money by utilizing existing infrastructure for the Games, such as university dormitories and USC's famous Memorial Coliseum, a product itself of Los Angeles's first Olympics in 1932. Only two new venues—the Swim Stadium at USC and the Olympic Velodrome at CSUDH—were built for the Games (International Olympic Committee, 2017), allowing the City to execute the most profitable Olympics in history, pocketing a significant \$232.5 million (Llewellyn, Gleaves, & Wilson, 5).

This profit was returned directly to the community in the form of an endowment for the LA 84 Foundation, which empowers youth through sport, providing financial grants and programming to over 500,000 young people annually. With the help of LA 84, enthusiasm for sports in the region blossomed, with almost 100 sports facilities being constructed or renovated in Southern California within thirty years of the Games (Llewellyn, Gleaves, & Wilson, 5).

Social Cohesion

The designers that staged LA '84—Jon Jerde, Debroah Sussman, and Paul Prezja—had a particular goal: to unify the city.

To do so, they employed a cost-effective, “kit of parts” design that utilized simple, colorful, and mostly temporary elements such as tents, banners, and scaffolds. Inspired by the the 1968 Mexico City Olympics’ use of bright colors, Jerde, Sussman, and Prezja adopted a color scheme that utilized magentas, yellows, aquas, and oranges, offering a modern twist on traditional American colors that emphasized Los Angeles’s growing multiculturalism (Morgan, 2021).

“If L.A. was a cultural melting pot, then so too was the Games’ palette,” argued one article. According to its analysis, yellow and magenta represented the Pacific Rim, Asia, and Latin America and aqua Greece and the Mediterranean (Morgan, 2021).

This bold color scheme was also meant to connect the disparate corners of Los Angeles, with the ‘84 Games including venues as far as 100 miles west of the city proper. “This thing was spread all over,” said the designer Prezja in an interview. “You had to make something that would stand out and draw the venues together [...] and locally, people told us that this was the first time Los Angeles was a unified whole” (Morgan, 2021).

Following the Olympics, Jerde, Sussman, and Prezja’s work was recognized as the “Design of the Decade” by TIME Magazine, but, looking at the city today, one could hardly tell that the ‘84 Games ever took place. That, in part, was the beauty, and ingenuity, of their feat. They united the city without leaving a footprint, in most cases discarding or auctioning off their “kit of parts” (Morgan, 2021).



An example of the innovative Olympic design
Image source: [Sussman/Prezja & Co.](#)

Clean Air & Mobility Infrastructure

Traffic congestion and pollution, perhaps Los Angeles’s most notorious ills, were virtual non-factors during the ‘84 Games. With residents encouraged either to stay home, “[throng] the sidewalks” (Leibowitz, 2014) or take advantage of the hundreds of new buses added to LA Metro’s fleet, the streets moved efficiently and the smog that often cloaked the city was almost nonexistent (Fonseca, 2024).

While the long-term effects of these changes may have been limited, some suggest that the Olympics’ successful mitigation of air pollution would inspire Governor George Deukmejian’s passage of the California Clean Air Act in 1988 (Leibowitz, 2014). Regardless, the city-wide commitment to emission reduction was yet another element of the Olympics that fostered unity and togetherness. One resident recalled her pride at not driving during the Games, which created a “great feeling of collective accomplishment” (Morgan, 2021).

CASE STUDY #2

Barcelona '92

When Barcelona secured its Olympic bid in 1986, it had no beach. Instead, on the city's now famous four-kilometer sandy coast, one could find only train tracks and factories (Springer, 2014). It was the Olympics that inspired the City to import sand from Egypt (Barcelona Metropolitan, 2022), clear the remnants of General Franco's industrial Barcelona, and finally embrace the Mediterranean as an indispensable feature of its landscape (GPAINNOVA).

Barcelona's beach is the most visible remnant of its groundbreaking 1992 Olympic Games, but certainly not the only one. Indeed, despite political tensions and terrorists threats (Guerrero Vall, 2022), the Barcelona Games were not only successful, but genre-defining: the first to be explicitly utilized as a means to "fast track" urban regeneration (Monclús, 406).



People enjoying Barcelona's iconic beach, a product of urban regeneration during the Olympics

Image source: [Getty Images](#)

A story of reinvention, humanization, and democratization (Martínez Euklidiadis, 2021) the Barcelona Olympics rebirthed a city while meeting a specific international moment. It was the first Olympics since 1972 without a single boycott, staged after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the end of South African apartheid in 1990, and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 (International Olympic Committee, 2022).

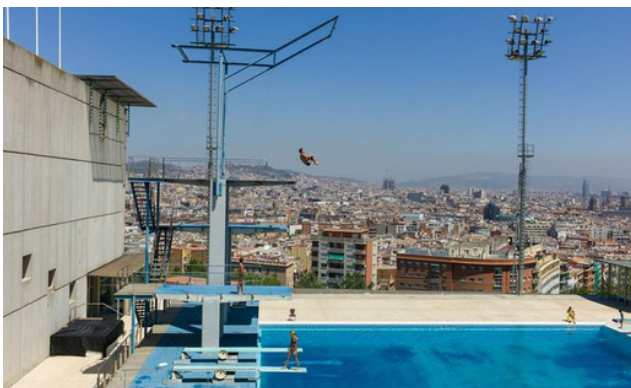
Urban Regeneration

Barcelona's urban regeneration movement, influenced by democratization and driven by neighborhood associations, preceded its Olympic bid, starting in earnest after General Franco's death in 1975 (McNeill, 246). The Olympics provided the opportunity, and funding, to realize the city's vision for regeneration (Guerrero Vall, 2022).

Beyond the beachfront, the Olympics saw the reimagining of Barcelona into 12 "areas of new centrality," which spread resources, and amenities, more evenly throughout the city (Monclús, 411). This included targeted investments in historically underserved neighborhoods and the construction of over 200 public squares, open spaces, and schools (LSE Cities, 2013).

The Olympic Village itself was a repurposing of an industrial, factory-heavy neighborhood on Barcelona's coast. After the Games, it became the sea-facing El Poblenou neighborhood, now considered by some the city's "creative heart" (Fleischer & Martín, 2022).

Barcelona's Montjuïc district, southeast of El Poblenou, was another area of the city brought to life by the Olympics. A historic neighborhood, Montjuïc housed the '92 Olympic Stadium, which was formerly the site of the 1929 International Exposition. Montjuïc also boasted sports centers and architectural wonders like the unmistakable telecommunications tower, the La Foixarda rugby field, and the swimming pool now immortalized in iconic photographs of the Games (Barcelona Global Blog, 2022).



The Barcelona Olympic Swimming Pool with an astonishing view of the city in the background

Image source: [Jon Pack and Gary Hustwit](#)

But despite its focus on modernization, the Barcelona Olympics did not slough-off the city's storied past. Instead, the Olympic Committee honored and reimaged it, refurbishing historic buildings such as the Beaulieu Palace and Montjuïc Stadium (Martínez Eukliadis, 2021) and repurposing relics like the abandoned Estació de Nord Railway station, which became a sports facility (International Olympic Committee, 2022).

Social Cohesion

The Barcelona Olympics was a unifying force for residents bursting with pride for their reinvented city. And this was the result of intentional efforts.

In the four years leading up to the Games, the City fostered community and cultural appreciation among its residents, staging a "Cultural Olympiad" that honored Barcelona's artistic history and celebrated its growth as an international metropolis (Sánchez López, 2022).

The Games themselves saw nearly 50,000 local residents volunteer, and led to the creation of an organization called Voluntaris 2000, which continues to support sporting events today. Many credit the Barcelona Olympics more broadly with establishing Spain's now famous sports culture (Guerrero Vall, 2022).

Economic Sustainability

The Barcelona Olympics, driven by both public and private funding, generated an induced economic impact of nearly \$20 billion (Martínez Eukliadis, 2021). This was thanks in part to some prudent decision-making by the Olympic Committee, such as the usage of cruise ships to supplement hotel accommodations, which allowed the city to avoid excessive new construction (Guerrero Vall, 2022).

After the Games, Barcelona became the fourth most popular center for businesses in Europe (Usborne, 2008) and enjoyed a meteoric tourism boom. Previously a sidekick to the Spanish capital Madrid, Barcelona is now in the top five most visited cities in Europe (Garcia, 2024), raking in 12.75 billion euros annually from tourism alone (Mas de Xaxàs, 2024).

Transportation & Environment

The Barcelona Olympics spurred significant infrastructural improvements, including a 268% increase in the city's ponds and fountains and the construction of 78 kilometers of new roads (Barcelona Metropolitan, 2022).

Most iconic were the ring roads (*rondas*), which drastically reduced congestion, connecting the city's four main Olympic venues and more evenly distributing its traffic flow (Bohigas).



The Ronda Litoral on Barcelona's coast

Image source: [Ajuntament de Barcelona](#)

Throughout the Olympics, Barcelona also implemented a smoke-free Games and cleaned of the Segre River and Banyoles Lake (Aragón-Pérez, 2019, 24).

Although minor, these initiatives to improve cleanliness and protect the environment, combined with the massive urban regeneration, social cohesion, and infrastructural efforts, were critical to the Olympics' humanization and modernization of Barcelona.

In many ways, the Olympics changed the city of Barcelona as we know it. In the words of Pere Miró of the IOC, "there was a Barcelona before the games and a Barcelona after the games. [...] It was a city complete transformed, in a positive way" (International Olympic Committee, 2022).

CASE STUDY #3

Atlanta '96

The legacy of the 1996 Atlanta Olympics is perhaps more fraught than that of the previous two. Some may remember the Games primarily for the deadly terrorist bombing at the Centennial Olympic Park. Others may remember it for its harmful impact on the unhoused community, or its insufficient investment in historically underserved neighborhoods such as Pittsburgh (Littlefield, 2016).

The reality is that the '96 Games were imperfect, but their imperfection recalls the complex history of Atlanta itself: a city defined both by the confederacy and the Civil Rights Movement (Tiller, 2019).

One can acknowledge the Games' flaws while also highlighting its positive transformations. The Olympics turned Atlanta, a consummate underdog (Kirkpatrick, 2016) often mistaken for Atlantic City (Nickisch, 2015), into an international force to be reckoned with. What's more, by beating out Athens to secure the coveted Centennial Olympic bid, Atlanta put the oft overlooked American South on the map.

Urban Regeneration

The project that most defined the Atlanta Olympics was the construction of Centennial Olympic Park. Previously a downtrodden space filled with warehouses, Centennial Olympic Park, equipped with a Fountain of Rings, concert venues, and open green space, breathed new life into Atlanta's downtown (Nickisch, 2015).

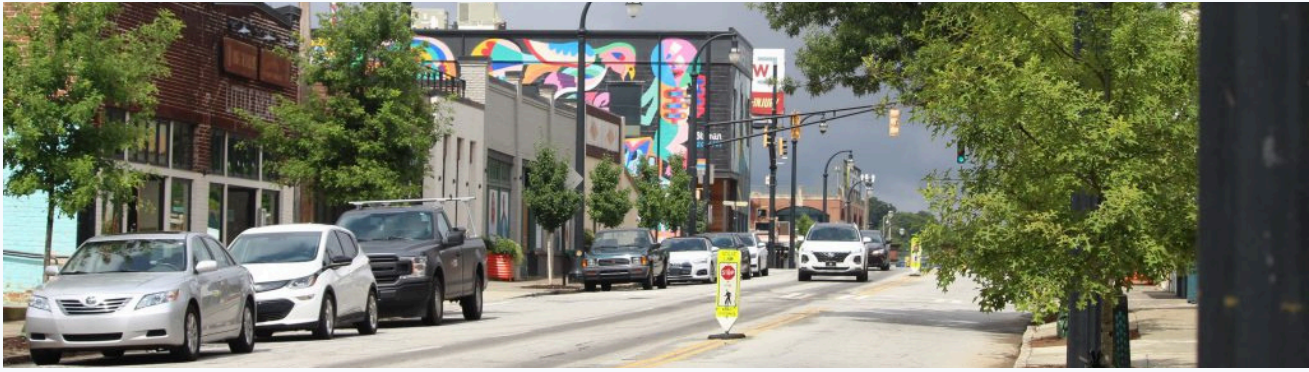
Built with \$75 million of private money, the 21-acre Centennial Olympic Park was, at the time of its construction, the biggest urban green space built in the United States in over two decades (International Olympic Committee, 2024).

It also helped spur growth in a forgotten Downtown, contributing to a tenfold increase in residents in the area. It would inspire several major developments to spring up in the area following the Olympics, such as the Georgia Aquarium, the College Football Hall of Fame, and the National Center for Civil and Human Rights (Nickisch, 2015).

Several other venues built during the Atlanta Olympics have had long-lasting impacts on the city. The Forbes Arena at Morehouse College, the famous Centennial Olympic Stadium that was later repurposed as the Atlanta Braves' baseball park and then the GSU Football Stadium, and the Georgia Tech Olympics' Aquatic Center are all still used today (Tiller, 2019).



Centennial Olympic Park in Downtown Atlanta
Image source: [Flickr](#)



A main thoroughfare in the Summerhill Neighborhood of Atlanta **Image source:** wabe.org

Despite its controversial legacy when it comes to the unhoused community and historically underserved neighborhoods, the Atlanta Olympics did see the revitalization of historically underresourced neighborhoods and developments such as Summerhill and Techwood Clark Homes.

The Summerhill neighborhood, which housed the Olympic Stadium, had 1,000 vacant properties prior to the Olympics. The Olympics left the community with a large park, millions of dollars of community grants, infrastructure improvements such as the installation of more streetlights, and an investment in mixed-income and single family housing (Nickisch, 2015).

Economic Sustainability

Partially drawing from the Los Angeles '84 model, the Atlanta Olympic Committee used a combination of tax money and corporate sponsorship to fund an Olympics that brought in between \$3.5 and \$5.1 billion (Research Atlanta, 1996, 2) and turned a \$10 million profit (Tiller, 2019).

The Atlanta Olympics also had a significant impact on employment. One study found that employment gains in Georgia counties affected by the Olympics exceeded other Georgia counties by 11% (Hotchkiss, 2015).

Perhaps most importantly, the once overlooked Atlanta attracted scores of Fortune 500 companies (Nickisch, 2015) after the Olympics, now boasting the 8th highest concentration in the country (Saporta, 2024).

Transportation & Green Infrastructure

Despite certain traffic management challenges during the Atlanta Olympics, (Drozdiak, 1996), the Games led to noteworthy infrastructure improvements. An international design competition reimaged Peachtree Street, Auburn Avenue, and Woodruff Park in Downtown Atlanta, leading to the repaving of poorly maintained streets and sidewalks ((Research Atlanta, 1996, 22), the installation of benches, the addition of 1200 new streetlights added and 10,000 trees (International Olympic Committee, 2024).

During the Olympics, private vehicles were banned from Downtown (McBurney, 2024, 33) and hundreds of alternative-fuel vehicles were used throughout the city. This both reduced traffic congestion and drastically improved air quality (Anderson, 1996), leading to better health outcomes for people with asthma (Friedman, 2001).

Some also argue that momentum from the Olympics inspired the construction of the Atlanta BeltLine, a 22-mile loop that includes hiking trails, parks, and a light-rail (Kirkpatrick, 2016).

Olympic venues such as the Aquatic Center, equipped with the world's largest solar roof-top energy system, also contributed to positive environmental impacts. A joint venture with the US Department of Energy, Georgia Tech, and Georgia Power, the Aquatic Center relied on solar power to heat its pools, conserving energy and saving roughly \$30,000 dollars a year (Anderson, 1996).

Social Cohesion

According to AJ Robinson, president of the Atlanta Downtown Improvement District, the Atlanta Olympics was the “epitome” of a city “punching above its weight.” The Olympics brought people together under the mantra “why not us?” (Kirkpatrick, 2016).

Other civic leaders in Atlanta, such as Hala Modellmog and Dan Corso of the Chamber of Commerce, argued that the Olympics taught Atlantans how to collaborate to achieve major feats. A post-Olympic ethnographic study focused on millennials in Atlanta revealed that people perceive Atlanta as a “place that can make things happen” (Kirkpatrick, 2016).

And not just Atlantans were convinced of this. Indeed, Atlanta, the underdog city from the American South, now attracts nearly 50 million United States visitors and ranks among the top 15 destinations for overseas travelers (Kirkpatrick, 2016).

No one seems to be mistaking it for Atlantic City anymore.

CASE STUDY #4

Sydney '00

Hosted during a time of rapid globalization, the 2000 Olympics were a chance for Sydney, then a so-called “middle power city” (Wade, 2020) to integrate itself into the international community. What’s more, Sydney saw the Olympics as an opportunity to *green* its city, pitching it as an “environmental games,” that focused on cleaning and reimagining its industrial past (Tetra Tech Coffey).

Urban Regeneration & Green Infrastructure

The Sydney Olympics was a masterclass in leveraging an international event to drive green and environmentally friendly urban regeneration. The clearest example of this is the cleaning of Homebush Bay in West Sydney, a former industrial site that would be transformed into the Sydney Olympic Park. Redeveloping the Homebush Bay, which was filled to the brim with contaminants such as asbestos, dioxin, and pesticides (Davidson & McNeill, 2012, 1629), was a massive undertaking, requiring the removal of 9 million cubic meters of waste and installment of large-scale water recycling infrastructure (Yamawaki & Duarte, 2014, 3).

The 430-hectare and 1,000-acre Sydney Olympic Park became not just the center of the Sydney Olympics, but also an impressive wildlife reserve. Additionally, the cleaning of Homebush Bay included the capturing and shaping of the contaminants into 13 mounds, which both safely contained the harmful materials and added an innovative architectural and recreational feature to the park (Davidson & McNeill, 2012, 1629).

The construction of the Sydney Olympic Park included a significant reimagining of the surrounding suburbs. An Olympic Village was built north of the park and included 5000 houses equipped with solar and wastewater recycling infrastructure. After the Games, the village would become the Newington neighborhood (Yamawaki & Duarte, 2014, 3).

The suburb of Rhodes outside of the Olympic Park went from an uninhabited former industrial area to a thriving residential area, although mostly occupied by high-income individuals (Yamawaki & Duarte, 2014, 27).



One of the mounds repurposed from harmful contaminants in the Sydney Olympic Park

Image source: sydneyolympicpark.nsw.gov

The Olympic Park was also equipped with highly energy-efficient venues, such as the Sydney SuperDome. The SuperDome boasts the largest photovoltaic (PV) energy system in Australia, which not only powered much of the park itself, but also contributed nearly 1 million kilowatt hours of energy to Sydney's power grid (3BL Media, 2020).

Social Cohesion

The Sydney Olympics brought residents together, with the Olympic Park serving as a magnet that, twenty years after the Games, is still attracting as many as hundreds of thousands of visitors a month (3BL Media, 2020).

Similar to past Olympics such as Barcelona '92, Sydney '00 inspired a massive volunteer movement, with 40,000 residents helping staff the Games. Many of these volunteers would go on to assist with future Australian sporting events in Melbourne and the Gold Coast (3BL Media, 2020).

At Sydney Olympic Park, the legendary Aboriginal Australian sprinter Catherine Freeman lit the Olympic Cauldron, later winning the 400 meter race in what is now among the most iconic Olympic moments of all time. Some consider it to be a key turning point in the Australian government's treatment of its Indigenous inhabitants, arguably inspiring the official apology from Prime Minister Kevin Rudd several years after the Games (3BL Media, 2020).

Indeed, many Indigenous Australians felt welcomed by the Sydney Olympics. One person recounted the moving words of IOC President San Antonio Samaranch, who declared that the Indigenous community "helped to write a "glorious chapter in the history of Australia" (Johannessen, 2020).



Olympian Catherine Freeman posing with a Gold Medal

Image source: [AFP via Getty Images](#)

The Sydney Olympics has lived on as a unifying force, with nearly 20 million residents gathering to celebrate the Games' 10th anniversary (International Olympic Committee, 2020).

Economic Sustainability

Primarily publicly funded (Yamawaki & Duarte, 2014, 3), the Games contributed roughly 6-7 billion Australian dollars to the GDP, created 100,000 new jobs, and increased tourism numbers by 1.6 million per year (International Olympic Committee, 2016).

In 2018-19, the Homebush Bay-Silverwater statistical area, much of which is the Sydney Olympic Park, had an economic output of \$5.53 billion, the eighth largest in the State of New South Wales (Wade, 2020).

The park itself contains 230 businesses and contributes roughly 1 billion Australian dollars to the local economy a year (International Olympic Committee, 2016).

Sydney Olympic Park's economic impact is expected to continue expanding with the West Metro rail project, which will connect the park to Sydney's Central Business District business district and the suburb of Parramatta in 2030 (Wade, 2020).

Also continuing to grow is the legacy of the Sydney Olympics as a *green* Games, with future Olympic committees emulating Sydney's model (Osborne, 2010), and with the Olympics becoming increasingly sustainable in recent years (International Olympic Committee, 2024).

03

Los Angeles '28: A Golden Opportunity

Preparations for the upcoming Los Angeles Olympics have been full head of steam since the City secured its bid in 2017.

The Los Angeles '28 Olympic Committee, inspired by its predecessors in '84, will not be constructing any new venues for the first time in Olympic history (Cortés Castro, 2024). Instead, they will be relying on the region's world class stadiums such as SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, the Crypto.com Arena in Downtown, and, once again, the Memorial Colosseum in Exposition Park.

The Los Angeles '28 Games will be an ambitious no-car affair (Cowan & Karlamangla, 2024), with massive public transit infrastructure such as the extension of the D line from Downtown Los Angeles to the Olympic Village at UCLA, underway to help make this a reality. The D line extension is one of 28 Metro projects in the works ahead of the Olympics (Metro).

In anticipation of a massive tourism boom, in part aided by the Fifa Tournament in 2006 and the Super Bowl in 2007, Los Angeles's hotel industry has been rapidly growing. The City will be relying on revenue from both tourism and corporate sponsorships to offset the Games' roughly \$ 7 billion budget (Dalton & Ding, 2024)

However, there are still worries about the Games' potential negative effects.

Some residents of Inglewood, which will house several Olympic stadiums, claim that they are being pushed out of their homes (White, 2022). Others residents are concerned about what how the City will address the homelessness crisis (Dillon, 2024), fearing a return to the harsh tactics adopted during the '84 Games (NOlympics LA, 2020).

The City, as well as local activists, are painfully aware of these concerns. Mayor Karen Bass vowed not to bus the thousands of unhoused Angelenos out of the city ahead of the Olympics, as did the mayor of Paris before the '24 Games (Dillon, 2024). Organizations such as Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE) are advocating for the investment of some Olympic ticket revenue into affordable housing (Scauzillo, 2024). And the LA 28 Olympic Committee has created a consortium of local entities to promote equitable growth following the Olympics (LA 28).

No Olympics can be perfect, but Los Angeles '28 seems to be following in the footsteps of the case studies highlighted above. As we march towards 2028, a more concerted effort to marry city improvement projects with the needs of local communities will allow these Games to outshine even its most successful forebears.

04 Conclusion

The four case studies detailed in this paper are certainly not without their flaws. Like many major international events, the Los Angeles '84, Barcelona '92, Atlanta '96, and Sydney '00 Games led to increases in housing prices, spurred at-times uneven investment in their respective city's neighborhoods, and didn't properly care for unhoused community members.

The Olympics are imperfect, and each successive Games provides an opportunity to iterate and improve, to pave the way for something more just, equitable, and inclusive.

This report argues that Los Angeles '84, Barcelona '92, Atlanta '96, and Sydney '00 made several major contributions to the continued evolution of the Olympic Games as a positive vehicle for urban resilience, driving cities' urban regeneration,

improving their economic sustainability and social cohesion, and catalyzing large-scale infrastructure transformations.

Los Angeles '84 revealed how innovative and cost-effective spatial design can unite sprawling cities.

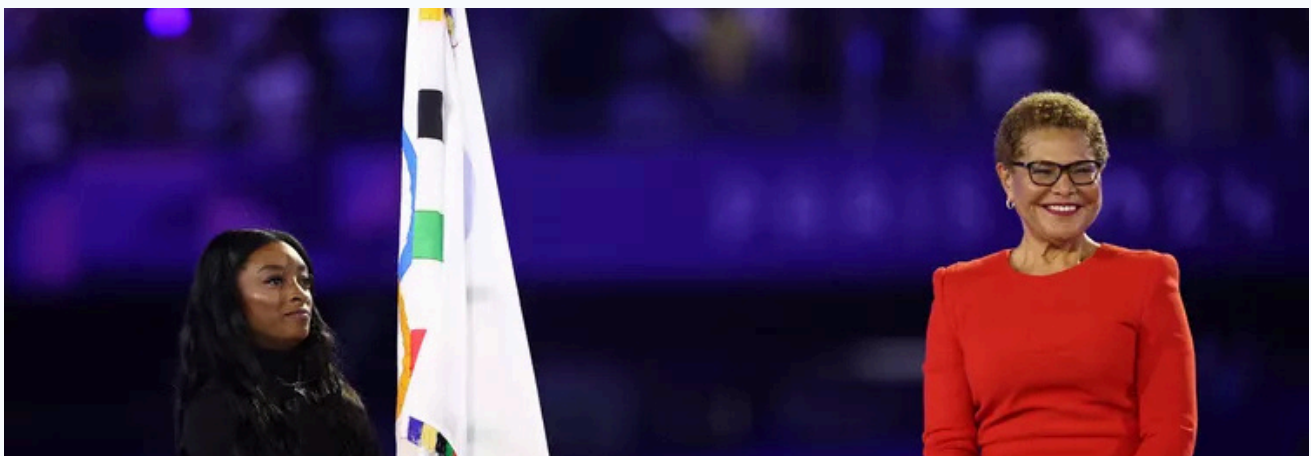
Barcelona '92 demonstrated the Olympics' ability to "humanize" a city's urban core, making it more pleasant, livable, and convenient.

Atlanta '96 showcased the ability of the Games to uplift an overlooked city.

Sydney '00 proved that green infrastructure and urban regeneration go hand-in-hand.

What will the enduring legacy of Los Angeles '28 be?

That is up for us all to decide.



Olympian Simone Biles and Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass stand by the Olympic Flag during the Paris '24 Games
Image source: [AFP via Getty Images](#)

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An aerial photograph of a coastal town, likely in the Philippines, showing a river flowing through the center. The town is built on a hillside with many small, closely packed houses. The foreground and middle ground are dominated by agricultural fields, possibly rice paddies, which are arranged in long, narrow strips. The entire image has a blue color overlay.

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