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MIRDEC 2018

MIRDEC-8th
International Academic Conference
Social Sciences, Multidisciplinary, Economics,
Business and Finance Studies
(Global Meeting of Social Science Community)

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS LISBON, PORTUGAL

Full Paper Series

Editors
Antonio Focacci
Adam Pawlicz
Kemal Cebeci
Tanu M. Goyal

RadissonBlu, Lisbon, Portugal
29-31 May 2018

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University Lusófona, Lisbon

Ana Catarina Pagarim Ribeiro Kaizeler

Globalization and Development Challenges
Socius - Research Centre in Economic Sociology and the Sociology of Organizations,
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Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Portugal

Joaquim Ramos Silva

The Present State of International Economics: Theoretical and Policy Implications
University of Lisbon, Portugal

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FERNANDA NEUTEL

THE EUROPEAN UNION CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE: MAKING CONCESSIONS
OR MOVING FORWARD 3

ROSA MARIA VELAZQUEZ SANCHEZ, JOAO GABRIEL BOTO DE MATOS CAEIRO, JESUS GOMEZ VELAZQUEZ AND HONORIO ANTONIO GARCIA

PERMANENCY INDICATORS OF TRADITIONAL TOURISM ENTERPRISES IN
PUERTO RICO AND PUERTO ESCONDIDO, MEXICO 13

ROSALIA CASTELLANO, GAETANO MUSELLA AND GENNARO PUNZO

EXPLORING THE DETERMINANTS OF SEPARATE WASTE COLLECTION FROM A
SPATIAL PERSPECTIVE 25

VALERIA COCCO AND MARCO BROGNA

MEGA EVENTS: A CRITICAL POINT OF VIEW 35

ANA MARIA DIVISEVICI

THE ROLE OF THE COLONIZATION PROCESS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF 19TH
CENTURY BUKOVINA: A CASE STUDY OF CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY 47

LEDIA THOMO, INES NURJA (HEBA) AND KOZETA SEVRANI

THE DECOMPOSITION OF INEQUALITY AND POVERTY IN ALBANIA..... 55

TIMUR MADREIMOV AND LI LEIMING

GAS DEMAND AND GROWTH IN MIDDLE INCOME COUNTRIES 69

REZART PRIFTI

BLENDED LEARNING: INNOVATING TO IMPROVE ALBANIAN EDUCATION
SYSTEM 73

MARTIN SERREQI

PERSONNEL ECONOMICS IN DEVELOPING ECONOMIES: PERSPECTIVE OF THE
ALBANIAN CONTEXT 107

ANA KEKEZI

COOL MEDIA APPROACH TO ENHANCE DOMESTIC TOURISM IN DEVELOPING
COUNTRIES (ALBANIA)..... 115

SAULET ALPYSBAYEVA

CORPUS-BASED TEXT AND DISCOURSE ANALYSIS ON TOLERANCE 137

ANA MARIA DIVISEVICI

DRIFTING LANDSCAPES IN BUKOVINA: GURA- HUMORULUI PLACE AND SPACE:
A CASE STUDY 147

**OXANA YURYEVNA POSUKHOVA, LUDMILA VLADISLAVOVNA KLIMENKO
AND PAVLINA VIKTOROVNA BALDOVSKAYA**

LABOR PRECARIZATION OF HELPING PROFESSIONS IN RUSSIAN CITIES:
EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE 159

**STEFANIA DIMOPOULOU, VASILIKI AVGERINOU, STAMATINA-ELENI
SAMIOTI AND TRIPOLITSIOTI ALEXANDRA**

TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT AS A SELF EVALUATION TOOL IN FINANCIAL
AND SPORTS ORGANIZATIONS 167

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VALERIA COCCO¹ AND MARCO BROGNA²

MEGA EVENTS: A CRITICAL POINT OF VIEW

Abstract

The paper aims to focus on the debate about mega event, and in particular on the effects that an important “media event” is able to generate on the territory and on its tourism attractiveness. On the one hand, mega events can be considered as a strong tourist attraction, and as powerful opportunities to improve the image of the city and to attract national and international visitors (Mihalik and Simoneita, 1998); on the other hand, they can represent a real barrier to development, “contributing to the naturalization of social inequalities” (Horne, 2007). In the current socio-political context, the question concerning benefits of a mega event in the host city is widely discussed. In the last two decades, there was a “race for bidding”, but currently, the great number of protests and debts influenced the Olympic territories, discouraging the frenetic rush to the Games. In the literature, the question is controversial, and the experts doubt about strategies and policies applied by events’ stakeholders, not often meeting the concrete opportunities for territories and the needs of communities.

Keywords: Mega events, policies, legacy, tourism

JEL Codes: Z29

1. Introduction

This paper offers an analysis of mega events and, in particular, of the Olympic Games, that are considered one of the most celebrated sport mega events of modern times and characterized by a strong global media impact on host territories (Cocco, 2017).

Hosting a mega event such as the Olympic Games could be a challenge for the redevelopment of the host city and surrounding territories. In fact, according to Müller (2017), the Olympics are able to act as a catalyst for urban development, as a potent vehicle for post-industrial adjustment (Broudehoux and Sanchez, 2016). In fact, according to some authors (Essex, Chalkley, 1998; Mihalik and Simoneita, 1998; Guala, 2006; Celant et al., 2014), mega events are an opportunity for the restyling, renewal and regeneration of the host cities, or rather, a development tool for the territory and for the creation of a territorial brand, as well as a strong tourism attractor that thanks to adequate governance and appropriate strategies can generate large benefits, i.e. the use of culture and sport to revive already existing structures and depressed areas (Broudehoux and Sanchez, 2016), or even to renew the city’s image, with a particular emphasis on urban marketing and environmental strategies.

On many occasions, staging a mega event is a way of restating the priorities of urban actions and policies (Broudehoux and Sanchez, 2016). In this way, mega events as exceptional happenings are powerful engines for promoting market-oriented policies (Clark et al., 2016) and local economic growth (Dansero and Mela, 2007).

Since the “model events” of Los Angeles 1984 and Barcelona 1992 Olympics, there has been a clear increase in the number of cities bidding to host the Olympics, perceived by local leaders as an opportunity to improve national and regional economies, in the short run, offering social-economic benefits to the surrounding territories (Malfas et al., 2004). Furthermore, a discussion of the history of

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the Olympic Games reveals that only a few cases of “legacy benefits” have occurred in the last 30 years. In effect, in the last two decades, staging a mega event has not been a good choice for cities, as in most cases they have come out defeated and indebted because of the huge expenses linked to overestimated forecasts of a mega event ‘legacy benefits’ (Clark et al., 2016, p.87). For this reason, the legacy of the mega event on the territory that was often called heritage, emphasizing the positive meaning of the term; nowadays, it is defined more generally legacy, without necessarily placing a positive accent on the term, because they have not always been favorable the territorial changes achieved during the Games (Brognna, Cocco, 2017).

In this context, it is evident a double effect that a mega event can generate in terms of opportunities or damages on a territory.

So, the aim of the paper is to investigate the concepts of ‘Regeneration Games’ (Cochrane and Peck, 1996, p.1319), “urbanalisation” and “boosterism” (Hiller, 2000, p.440) and the wide debate on mega events, related to the debate between growth and development, bottom up and top down policies, élites and minorities needs.

In addition, through an analysis of the key ideas of experts, this paper also traces the changes in the strand of the literature in the last few decades, in terms of a change of perspective as evolution, or consequence due to the damage done to many cities “spoiled” by mega events. In fact, many experts have made critical evaluations of the impact of mega events on host cities and regions. They are skeptical on the actual benefits, cause of the too many broken promises and the combination of overpromising benefits and underestimated costs, that emphasized the so-called “mega- event syndrome” (Müller, 2017, pp.6-15).

Thus, focusing on the legacy effect, it is evident the socio-economic impacts generated by mega events in urban transformation, in particular the social, cultural and economic effects are able to modify the quality of life.

An analysis of the different literature, of divergent perspectives, allows a critical discussion of the urban transformation of host city and about policies and strategies applied by elites and stakeholders during the mega events.

The last goal of the research, therefore, is to investigate the reasons for this change in the experts thought, and to find out whether this change of interest in the literature could reflect the end of an era of mega event as an instrument of regeneration and competitiveness of the territories host.

2. A changing literature

Mega events’ literature is vast and varied. Mega events’ study fits into many different fields, so experts’ study has many different points of view.

The Olympic Games are considered the most important and significant sport events of the modern era, and they are defined as mega events because of the strong global impact that characterizes them.

The literature highlights a profound thought change over time, so that it is possible to identify two clear literary strands, often contrasting.

Experts' interest seems to shift from the socio-economic to the sociological context, leading experts to increasingly focus their attention on issues such as the right of minorities and social justice and equity.

The contrasting issues of the two main strands of literature are also confirmed by the current socio-political context of the Olympic territories. There is a radical passage from neoliberal thinking that enhances the mega event as an instrument of regeneration of territories, to a heterodox literature, capable of investigating themes such as the relationship between mega events and local communities, between elites and minorities.

From the analysis of the literature and the socio-political context, it is natural to wonder the meaning and causes of change, and if the mega event can still be able to bring added value to the territory, or if it never has been able to make it.

Such a radical change in literature can be read as an evolution by experts, who begin to shift the focus of their attention from the only factors and determinants of economic and environmental impact (i.e. regeneration of the territory, etc.), to take into account social equity and the right to the city (Harvey, 2014).

Therefore, literature changes its approach, increasingly focuses on sociological themes. It is a new interpretation that studies the phenomenon no longer quantitatively, but qualitatively.

Due to a reading of reality from a less orthodox or less neoliberal perspective, supported by the last two decades' Olympic failures that occurred from Atlanta 1996 to Rio de Janeiro 2016 Summer Olympics, literature is now shifting its focus on issues of big relevance (i.e. social justice), providing a significant contribution to the new vision of the event in the socio-political sphere.

In fact, the different fragments of question of this "new" literature find "common ground" in the critical approach to Orthodox literature, which paid too little attention to issues related to the quality of life of local communities and minorities.

The "new" literature defines itself as critical, in considering the mega event as an opportunity for regeneration, competitiveness, creation of urban marketing, and it condemns the neoliberal spirit assumed by contemporary globalization, which is shown here in the form of a mega event itself.

Therefore, analyzing the different literature, in both divergent perspectives, it is possible to suggest a critical discussion on the transformation of the vision of the instrument of the mega event, related to a new awareness of cities and communities that aim to brake the rush to the Games.

2.1. From hallmark event to mega event

The literature is interested in socio-economic terms to the issue of mega Olympic events since the '70s, when the Olympics were defined hallmark events (Ritchie, 1974).

For about fifteen years the Olympic event is considered a quality event - *hallmark event*- and only in a few cases appear other terminologies, such as *landmark event* (Hiller, 1990), and *special event* (Getz, 1989).

Since the early 90s, a new terminology has been affirmed in the literature to indicate the great events and better identify the importance of the Olympic event, so it is introduced the concept of *mega event*. Already in 1987 Ritchie, and a few other authors (Socher and Tschurtschenthaler, 1987; Kurtzman, 1987) introduced the new term with reference to the big events attractors of tourism.

With the new millennium, the term mega event seems to increasingly take hold in the literature related

to the Olympics, marginalizing the now obsolete terminologies - hallmark events, special events - in reference to events of lesser importance, although, still "some authors use indifferently mega or big events, or still special or hallmark events "(Guala, 2015).

Maurice Roche (2000) identifies four categories of events: mega events, special events, hallmark events, community events, based on a re-elaboration of the classification previously carried out by Hall in 1989 (Guala, 2015).

In the works of a few years prior to the ones of Roche (2000), realized by Ritchie (1984), Hall (1999), Chalkley and Essex (1999), the term "hallmark event" is defined as the type of event able to obtain recognition, attention and interest at international level, in other words, an event worthy of a "quality label".

Hiller (2000), Hall (1992) and Getz (1997) define special events as "short-lived and high-profile" events (Hiller, 2000), whose organization has considerable territorial effects with a particular economic, social, cultural and political value (Hiller, 2000) and characterized by a massive involvement of users from different territories.

The community event, having a regional or local scope, is therefore excluded from the discussion regarding the use of this term in relation to the literature of Olympic interest and relative to large-scale events.

In 1987 Ritchie defined the "mega event" as an important, recurring or only once organized event, of short duration, which serves to increase the awareness, the charm, the economy of a short and / or long-term tourist destination. The prefix "mega" refers, therefore, to an out-of-the-ordinary and large-scale event (Salazar, 2016, Brogna, Cocco, 2017). The success of these events depends on their uniqueness, importance or ability to create interest and attractiveness (Ritchie, 1987). This definition fits perfectly with the mega sport event, named Olympic Games.

3. Mega event as media event

The mega event is a complex phenomenon: it is characterized by a temporary duration, but it is able to involve significant changes in the urban fabric of the host territory and in the daily life of the community. First of all, it is necessary to define the mega event according to its characteristics such as duration and scale, depending on the abundance of participants and spectators, (Celant et al., 2014, p.81), which may also include online/TV broadcasts.

A mega event can have an exceptional character, it is unrepeatable or repeatable only after many years (e.g. the Olympics, Jubilee, Expo), or it can have a more ordinary character thanks to regular and planned intervals (Celant et al., 2014).

Mega events are different according to size, scope and reach, geographical location and appeal (Salazar, 2016), and the ones with a major effect in economic and business terms are characterized by frequent periodic trends, a stable schedule and a worldwide reach (Cocco, 2017; Celant et al., 2014).

According to Müller (2017) there are four integral dimensions to be considered in the study of mega events: visitor attractiveness, mediated reach, costs and transformative impacts (Cocco, 2017).

In fact, although the Olympic Games are temporary mega events, just two weeks' duration, they are able to attract millions of people from all over the world, thanks to their international media coverage

(Kassens-Noor, 2016). For this reason, the Olympics, in the literature of the last twenty years, are defined mega events to affirm the relevance of interest at the global level, so the impact of global media on the host territories.

In essence, the city hosting the Games is transformed into a huge stage, obtaining a double possibility from such overexposure. Thanks to the worldwide scale, the mega event is often considered as a “media” event and it is able to experience as an opportunity for urban redevelopment and a push towards the modernization of the territory. The media involvement of a mega event can be distinguished between direct and indirect audiences – i.e. participants and spectators on the set or on the audiovisual streaming - (Celant et al., 2014: 81) and it is able to increase the notoriety and the visibility of the Olympic territory. Moreover, the strong impact of global media can have a double effect, precisely because of the excessive exposure of the host city during the period of the event. On the one hand, in fact, the mega event can act as a trigger to urban regeneration, offering the city the opportunity to gain notoriety and visibility at a global level (Brognna, Cocco, 2017); on the other hand, instead, as Zimbalist points out, this overexposure of the territory hosting the event can be a great asset to be managed, which can bring degenerative consequences to the territory in terms of image.

The role of the media can raise awareness of the host city. If, therefore, the territory conquers notoriety and interest through media spaces at a global level, it is thanks to the success of the event, but being at the center of the scene also entails considerable risks. At the same time cities, like celebrities, expect a certain respect also after the event, but their memory is likely to fade over time (Malfas et al., 2004, p.213). These features affect the tourism attractiveness and the territorial appeal (Roche, 2000), on the host city (Malfas et al., 2004). In fact, the implications of these events go far beyond the sport field (Guala, 2006), highlighting in this sense a transition from a sporting event to an urban event (Cocco, 2017).

4. The event and the city

Sports and events have always had a spatial and geographical dimension (Golubchikov, 2017: 253). In fact, the Olympics are closely linked to the figure of urban designers, engineers and architects, who become the actors in the organization of the event and are active in the transformation of the city (Malfas et al., 2004). So, analyzing the question from the Keynesian point of view, a great event offers the opportunity of a large-scale urban improvement (Malfas et al., 2004: 212) and it is often aimed at realizing a real mega- project (Golubchikov, 2017: 245).

The event marks the uniqueness of a certain place (Roche, 2000), thus, the challenge for the host territory in the performing time of the mega event must not only be to attract people and capital, but it is well more complex.

Events of global scale, such as the Olympics, are able to stimulate and accelerate the implementation of existing urban development plans (Kassens-Noor, 2016: 41-54), - as happened, for example, in the case of the Barcelona Olympics in 1992 -, or they can trigger a political strategy to relaunch abandoned urban areas (Kassens-Noor, 2016: 41-54), as in the case of the Sydney Olympics.

Observing the Olympics, under a neoliberal view, Golubchikov says that mega events are considered an opportunity to promote territories thanks to strategic plans (Golubchikov, 2017: 237-255). Graham and Marvin (1995: 169-189) believe that the vision of a mega event as an opportunity for urban regeneration is strongly associated with "post-Fordism". Mega events, in fact, are often considered as an opportunity for restyling, renewal and regeneration of the host cities, due to considerable capital expenditure and investments on venues and infrastructures in host territories.

Highlighted the link between territory and event, it is interesting to understand why the cities are pushed to host the mega Olympic events.

Matheson and Baade underline the link between the notoriety of the territory and the event, therefore the mega event "marks the city on the map", which can be a first reason to bid for Games, which can be better recognized in urban and citizens' pride. Not only. Cities want to bid the game to regenerate the urban fabric, renew abandoned areas and create a global brand of the territory. In short, their goal is to take advantage of the opportunity offered by the event to improve the urban fabric and increase visibility, notoriety and tourism attractiveness. Cities decide to stage an event of this magnitude of benefits, because they are blinded by the over-expected economic benefits and by the possibility and opportunity for urban regeneration.

The Olympics, as an exceptional event, has a temporary nature and a fixed date, so it is important to respect the deadlines and the constraints imposed for the realization of the event. The time constraint, on the one hand, may be able to help speed up the process of change and renewal of the city, i.e. construction of sports buildings, infrastructures, etc. in a short time (Hiller, 2000: 440). On the other hand, the deadline can generate distortive effects, with negative impacts on the territory. According to Müller (2017: 6-15), it is urban development that becomes an instrument for the event, not the reverse. From the sporting event to the urban event, the Olympics become an opportunity for a great urban transformation (Müller, 2015: 6-15), to the point that experts like Cochrane and Peck (1996: 1319-1336) define the Olympics as "Regeneration Games" (Malfas et al., 2004: 216), to underline the strong link between territory and event, symbolizing the basement of the transformation of the urban landscape of the host city. There are several factors that influence the rebirth and regeneration of the territory. For this reason, stakeholders have to choose the right strategy to adopt for the host region.

The mega event, changing the urban fabric, is also modifying the image of the territory and consequently the quality of life of the residents. In this context, governance plays an important role in urban regeneration. Considering, for example, the urban policies of the Sydney Olympics, at first glance, they appear virtuous ones. In fact, the Olympic Park, realized through the reclamation and recovery of an abandoned industrial area reserved for the containment of toxic waste, was destined to become the most important sports and recreational center in Sydney, with the greenest Olympic Village in the Olympic history. Instead, less than a year after the end of the Games, the huge Olympic installations of the park were abandoned, leaving as a legacy, in addition to the red budget, the so-called "white elephants" - Furrer (2002: 13) introduces the concept of "white elephants" as places and structures of excessive size that have been planned on the basis of Olympic crowds -. The territory acquiring great visibility at the world level during the event, needs an intelligent direction (Celata, 2016) to give life to a tourist imaginary and allow the territory itself to increase its competitive performance compared to other territories.

Although the classical literature does not doubt the catalytic drive of the Olympic event on the territory, the often more frequent case of "white elephants" (Furrer, 2002), raised up in recent decades, highlights the waste of resources and money effect of the Olympics and also the decay of the affected areas.

The heterodox literature reflects on the idea of "Olympic Barrier". In a first spot, it can sound as an oxymoron. In fact, sports are often thought as the element able to break down social and cultural barriers and to overcome limits. Yet, the Olympics, being a global event, is such as to contribute to the "naturalization of social inequalities" (Horne, 2007), to widen the social gaps between the city elites and that part of the poorest population. In fact, Roche (2000) defines the Olympic event as a bridge to whose margins are found, on the one hand elites and stakeholders who are the real beneficiaries of the event, on the other the population and minorities.

From an economic point of view, the Olympics can become a barrier to the growth and development of the territory, when investments in infrastructure represent a waste of money that leaves negative legacies to the territory. The Olympic legacy, in fact, can have degenerative impacts on the territory, which inevitably go to invest the tourism sector. According to the critical strand of literature, it is not enough to carry out an event, albeit with a global scope and character such as the Olympics, to generate tourist development on a given territory, because there is missing the allometric process through which to create a breaking point in the territory necessary to promote development (Celant, 2014). Moreover, in terms of tourism, a world event, tends to create more economic and social costs (i.e. the problems of temporary overcrowding of areas dedicated to the construction of new buildings or the Olympic Parks) rather than benefits, mostly considering a territory that already enjoys a strong notoriety and appeal in terms of tourism.

4.1. Build or preserve? The case of white elephants

Even if the main literature about mega sport events emphasizes the ‘legacy benefits’ offered by the Olympics to the host city in terms of new facilities and infrastructure, urban revival, notoriety, the city’s image and tourism appeal, major public welfare, additional employment and local business opportunities (Kasimati, 2003), negative impacts and the more and more frequent “white elephants”, - i.e. Olympic Villages - symbolizing the waste of money and decay of certain areas, have often proved the result of the Olympics games especially in the last 20 years (Flyvbjerg and Stewart, 2016).

Recent literature has also discussed the high construction costs of public sports infrastructure and venues, temporary crowding problems, the loss of visitors, property rental increases and temporary increases in employment and business activities, (Kasimati, 2003), as well as the “burning money effect”, social justice and poverty problems, e.g. Rio de Janeiro, 2016 (Costa, 2012; Venturini, 2014), and also abandoned Olympic areas and over-sized, underutilized sport facilities referred to as “white elephants”. Furrer (2002, p.1), ex-project manager of the International Olympic Committee (ICO), defined the concept of ‘white elephants’ as “over-sized venues and facilities that were planned with Olympic-size crowds and ticket sales in mind”. In fact, enormous urban venues such as Olympic parks, stadiums, or even hotels are designed into the urban fabric of host cities just for the two weeks’ mega event duration, and not for the post-event. As a result, the new buildings do not fit into a long-term urban planning policy. The new facilities neither respond to the local population’s needs in terms of leisure and cultural facilities, i.e. colossal hotels after the staging of the Games are oversupplied bringing negative effects on the host city or region’s hotel industry (Furrer, 2002), or they even become abandoned places, degrading the urban fabric of the Olympic area.

The Sydney Olympics 2000 is an interesting example in terms of white elephants and the recovery of abandoned areas. In fact, Sydney was credited with paying special attention to the environmental impact of mega events, and that is why the Sydney Olympics are defined as the “Green Games”. Despite the fact that the Sydney Olympic Park was built on a decontaminated and recovered industrial area, that was previously disused and designated to containing toxic waste, it became the most important sports and recreation center in Sydney with the greenest Olympic Village of all history. Nevertheless, nowadays, it represents a huge failure. Just a few months after the end of the Games, the massive Olympic facilities of the park were abandoned, leaving a “white elephant’s legacy” and the so-called ‘Sydney Jurassic Park’, so that the host city suffered a significant territorial and economic defeat (Furrer, 2002; Brogna and Cocco, forthcoming). In truth, new stadiums, new village accommodations and adapted transport systems draw attention to specific geographies because of their transformative, the environment and population effects across a city (Clark et al., 2016).

In other words, the Olympic Games change the city, not only during the duration of the event, but also in the so called "Olympic tails" – i.e. legacy of the event -.

Oversized venues became a white elephant problem, when they do not fit into the reuse strategies. There is a very fragile relationship between mega events and urban regeneration. In fact, the accomplishment of urban transformation and the construction of new facilities (i.e., a stadium, an Olympic Village, etc.) has to match the expected event capacity, but it is necessary to think, even before the creation of new venues, of the post-event reuse and the needs of the local people, so as to find a balance between the event and post-event capacity.

Thinking about the post-event during the implementation of urban planning policy would have given the opportunity for new buildings to be re-used in the long run after the end of the mega event. It is therefore necessary to rethink the cities in dynamic terms, paying particular attention to the socio-economic, territorial and environmental processes, which have always given rise to the evolution of the territories and which, if desired, can be positively influenced by the presence of mega events.

The reuse of sports facilities, built for the Olympics, is nowadays the real challenge the host city has to overcome in terms of territory development (Brognia and Cocco, 2017).

In a recent paper about the modern concept of urban regeneration and new approaches to the transformation of cities, Cangelli (2015, p.59) defines three basic concepts, "cities as common good, territory with a strong structure, and light architecture". Analyzing the concept of territory as a scarce resource, the new regeneration approaches are moving beyond traditional urban restoration and large-scale plans towards the idea of non-invasive initiatives (Cangelli, 2015), so that planning moves in the direction of recovery, preservation, reuse and the recycle of already existing structures, in this way reducing the construction of new buildings and consequently saving public money.

The idea of 'urban regeneration games' has to be balanced between the ancient and modern, the building of new venues and the preservation of already existing ones (Cangelli, 2015, p.66). Light architecture represents the modest intervention of the new venues accomplishment in urban fabric; thus, there is a need for urban planners, engineers, architects, and moreover, politicians and event stakeholders to fully understand the context, the social dynamics and citizens' needs.

A vivid debate still subsists about the issue 'build or preserve?' Local leaders and event stakeholders are generally inclined towards the creation of new structures as symbols of the city and an event's success, or even as an Olympic milestone (Furrer, 2002). Nevertheless, the last two decades has highlighted more failures than successes in the Olympic history. Indeed, in the last decade, the ICO raised the issue of permanent structures, proposing a reduction in the waste of resources, with the realization of temporary installations and removable works (Furrer, 2002). Using temporary structures is convenient for many reasons: first of all, it is a way of avoiding possible white elephants in the host city, with the consequent benefits of cost reductions, and a restricted environmental impact. Temporary venues also guarantee greater flexibility in the event planning phase and are a minor inconvenience to the local population due to lower construction time (Bozzato, 2012).

According to Müller (2017, p.14), "building temporary facilities such as sports venues can both be cheaper than building permanent facilities and eliminate maintenance costs after the event for facilities that are hardly used or would otherwise be too large. [...] There is, however, a drawback to temporary structures: they increase event-specific expenditure that is unproductive for urban development, so hosts must weigh the costs and benefits in each case".

Indeed, the positive legacy and local benefits promised by host cities, create public enthusiasm and support for the staging of the event. However, even though, large public expenditures seem to be justified by optimistic predictions, some experts are skeptical about the actual net economic benefits of hosting mega events (Zimbalist, 2010), as mentioned above, most of the new infrastructures built for the Games, typically become white elephants, generating, thus, the creation of a hybrid peri-urban area, and enlarging the unsolved question of the preservation of existing buildings and the debate about the legacy of events that nowadays is still open.

4.2. Reuse, reduce, recycle. The case of the Olympic village

In this regard, it is interesting to briefly open a parenthesis on the issue of the Olympic Village and its evolution over the years. “The origins of the idea of Olympic Village can be found in the thought of the same inventor of modern Olympics, Pierre de Coubertin” (Bortolotti, 2009, p.1).

Over the decades, there has been an evolution in the concept and idea of the Olympic Village. At the beginning of the modern Olympics, not so many athletes were involved in the competition, therefore there was less interest in building accommodation to host them. As the modern Olympics started to take hold, the need to create temporary accommodation for athletes during the Olympic Games led to the construction of a proper village, a miniature city (Bortolotti, 2009). From prefabricated structures to permanent structures, the Olympic Village became an integral part of the urban fabric; and the event started to move from a simple sports event to an urban event, able to regenerate the urban fabric and the redevelopment of peripheral areas, mainly thanks to the creation of new sites, or also, the transformation of already existing spaces. The Olympic Village became the ambitious building of new urban areas (Broudehoux and Sanchez, 2016). However, the past reveals more cases of Olympic Villages considered symbols of failure, rather than symbols of “Regeneration Games” (Cochrane and Peck, 1996, p.1319).

An interesting case study, is the Roman Olympic Village built in the late 1960s. On the occasion of the XVII Olympiad hosted in Rome an Olympic Village was created not far from the sports games center (Foro Italico). In actual fact, it was built in an area of the city consisting of shacks and abandoned land known as “Campo Parioli” (Salvo, 2014, p.139). The Olympic Village, as permanent accommodation, was an opportunity, offered by the Games, to socially ‘reclaim’ the area which was also very close to the historic center and, even more, to the wealthy suburbs (i.e. Parioli district) of the city of Rome (Salvo, 2014).

From an architectural point of view, the Olympic Village houses represented a huge innovation, inspired by Le Corbusier and “upgraded to the North European experiences, characterized by an unusual opening and permeability to the city historical and its natural surroundings” (Salvo, 2014, p. 139). The new Village emphasizes “home for all”, symbolizing ‘a different processing of the public housing complex type’ with respect to the Roman suburbs planned to house families displaced from demolished neighborhoods called “borgata” (Salvo, 2014). In the 1970s, just 10 years after the Games, the Village started its degradation process which ended thanks to the construction of the new auditorium in Rome, leading to an unexpected re- evaluation of the Olympic Village.

5. The élites and the event

Élites had a wide influence on Games’ planning and they are able to deviate event benefits towards their own interests at the expense of the disadvantaged segments of the population, creating segregation of minorities, inequality and social conflict (Oliveira et al., 2007, Veiner, 2009, Broudeoux, Sanchez, 2016). Mega events are strictly involved in the relationship between territory and élite; in fact, according to Roche, events could be represented as bridges able to link elites and people (Booth 2002). Mega

events are defined as an “integral component of 20th century urban development” (Muñoz, 2006; Clark et al., 2016), and also as “one of the most fundamentally political acts of the modern age” (Horne, Whannel, 2012) which, necessarily, advantages the few - elites - and disadvantages the more - people - (Clark et al., 2016). The strong influence of elites, that are able to convey any event benefits to their own interests, does not guarantee that elites’ presence delivers success of mega events (Roche, 2000, Booth 2002).

Therefore, looking at the issue from an economic point of view, a host city can spend a huge part of the public budget on building new infrastructures for the private interests of local élites.

Powerful elite groups, as entrepreneurs and politicians, head urban mega events; hence, local citizens’ influence is likely quite marginal (Roche, 2000, Booth 2002). If urban elites abuse their power in planning and organisation of the mega event, the gap between elites and disadvantaged people sharpens. According to many experts, there is no doubt that mega event has a determinant role regard to the issues of poverty and social exclusion (Malfas et al., 2004). Well, there is a wide discussion about it, particularly according the aspiration to social justice, as essential premise to obtain autonomy and social transformation (Marx and Engels, 1991; Freire, 2011, Clark et al., 2016).

Mega events can act as tools of social justice (Hiller, 2000), as response to poverty alleviation (Pillay, Bass, 2008), or in an opposite way, increasing social inequality. For example, considering the opportunity of building social houses through Olympic Village, and new infrastructure as facility and service improvements for disadvantaged people – i.e. Cape Town 2004 Olympics – (Hiller, 2000), mega event acts as catalyst and accelerator to the process of urban transformation, thanks to the fixed deadline’s bond (Hiller, 2000). However, there are many cases of negative political impacts of Olympic games, regarding housing relocations, rising rents and real estate prices (Roche, 2000), going to increase the gap between elites and people, in other words, social inequality increasing problems.

A recent case of social protest and inequality problems enlarged by staging mega events is the question of social conflicts of Rio de Janeiro, that in 2 years hosted the biggest sport events FIFA World Cup 2014 and Olympics 2016, and that was considered by Broudehoux and Sánchez as a “double whammy”. In fact, bidding to the World Cup and Olympic Games represented for Brazilian economy a negative factor: costs were escalating and the country was living an economic crisis, accompanied by “negative growth and a lack of funds to cover costs” (Flyvbjerg, 2016) with a difficult opportunity of readjustment. In light of this, administrations and citizens are starting to become aware of the riskiness of a mega event that is a development barrier, deciding to renounce the bidding to avoid debts and problems of social justice, protests and poverty.

Conclusions

According to a large part of the recent literature on mega events, the ones who benefit most from the Olympics in terms of positive effects are the economic and political elite. Urban leadership groups, entrepreneurs and politicians use their power to deliver the mega event (Clark et al., 2016), creating general consensus through a booster mechanism (Hiller, 2000), due to the fact that the community is instrumental for the success of the event (Clark et al., 2016). According to Pillay and Bass (2008, p. 329) ‘mega events are often used as “spectacles”, to promote urban “boosterism” that wed to a narrow-minded pro-growth vision of the city’. The large debate about mega event fits into the debate between growth and development, in fact, economic growth does not mean being capable of favouring the disadvantaged part of the population and guaranteeing equity. Taking into consideration the growth factor, there is no doubt about the mega events’ capability in creating jobs, considering both those jobs directly associated with the organization of the event itself, and those jobs indirectly associated with the

event, such as the construction industry, tourism and the retail industry. Yet, the issue of job creation is not devoid of problems: many jobs are temporary and there are over expectations, so that again it is the urban elites and entrepreneurs who mainly benefit, contributing to enlarging the inequality gap.

The debate is also open from the socio-economic point of view. Several times, infrastructures and venues built to host the mega event represent extra expenditures which neglect the real needs of the social community. At this point, what must be figured out is what is better for the territories: using public money to build a mega event that can be a local growth tool, but that cannot guarantee a legacy of success and benefits, or using public money to satisfy the primary needs of local communities, in so doing not taking advantage of the accelerator mega event. Creating a virtuous path, able to generate a balanced event, could be considered a utopia, but thanks to a synergistic approach between territories, it could also represent a first step towards curbing “mega events’ symptoms” (Müller, 2017, p.6).

But also, a virtuous governance that is able to reduce the bridge that is separating the elites from the people. A governance that is including bottom up strategies and the activeness of people in the decision of the future of territories, where the network between people and elites represents the only solution.

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