The switch between the traditional Olympic and Paralympic Games model and the new Paris 2024 model: A research perspective

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Abstract:Rising local costs, environmental damage, negative responses from local populations, and the abandonment of candidacies have made the Olympic and Paralympic Games model no longer sustainable for mega-events. The Olympic games that are to be held in Paris in 2024 must involve rebuilding a better Olympic and Paralympic Games (OPG) model with high global and local value and low direct local costs. Like London, Paris is a city shaped by heritage and will use this sporting and cultural heritage as a central element for the OPG model to become sustainable. This case study attempts to capture the shift between the circular heritage model (use of existing heritage) proposed by Paris and the traditional model illustrated by London 2012 by presenting the SWOT matrices of the two models.

Keywords: Circular model, Heritage city, Olympic and Paralympic Games, Paris 2024

Introduction

The Olympic and Paralympic Games (OPG) are a global event that have many positive effects, including being economically beneficial for the city that hosts the games. The OPG mega-event is a specific model in which the event takes place in one city and lasts no more than one month. This model is intended to provide the host city with a long-term legacy, as encouraged by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) since the games were held in Melbourne in 1956. However, the model is on decline due to negative effects from hosting the OPG and seems no longer sustainable. Paris 2024 is proposed as a new OPG model capable of resolving the weaknesses of the traditional model by establishing a circular heritage model that uses and reuses existing cultural and sport heritage sites (Ricordel, 2023). This research paper aims to study the evolution of the OPG model with the proposal of the Paris 2024 model. To do this, we present SWOT matrices that compare London 2012 and Paris 2024. We adopt the Plan Quality Evaluation methodology (Ricordel, 2022), which consists of applying the data triangulation process of Denzin (1978) to 11 official public documents and internet sites that are published or available in

preparation for the event by official organizing institutions and stakeholders. The information linked to the SWOT matrices is therefore based on the planning established four years before the event. Only for the "threat" quarter of the SWOT matrices do we take into account post-event information from academic studies in the literature. This article is organized as follows. In the first section, we address the question of why is the OPG model changing? In the second section, we demonstrate the differences between the traditional linear model and the new circular model of Paris 2024. In the third section, we present the results of our case study, showing the SWOT matrices for the traditional OGP of London 2012 and the circular model of Paris 2024.

1 Why a new OPG model?

The OPG begins with a giant, emotional opening ceremony followed by events that can inspire an entire generation. This mega-event is a global public good, first as a philosophy inherited from the Greeks based on cardinal virtues such as friendship, respect, and excellence inscribed in the stone of an Olympic charter defending peace, inclusion, and effort. Second, it is a movement aiming for a more peaceful world built on sport and education accompanied by numerous public policies focused on promoting cultural events, education, sport and initiatives, and health. Third, it is an accessible, televised event with 4 billion viewers and over 350,000 hours of free streaming.

Regarding the host city, the OPG event is likely to bring more economic benefits and visitors to the hosting city due to the heritage that remains longer than the event itself (Gratton & Preuss, 2008). All the new tangible heritage assets produced by the OPG include sports facilities, the Olympic village, and urban regeneration. However, there is also the intangible heritage linked to the games and the attractiveness of a highly publicized city during the event. Finally, the legacy of the Olympic Games generally extends well beyond sport and involves long-term economic, tourism, social, and environmental outcomes for the host city and the ability to accelerate or initiate changes in the material/social infrastructure and culture, thereby transforming the urban order (Essex and Chalkley, 1998; Hiller, 2006). This catalytic effect, where the city, region, state, and a myriad of actors are oriented in the same direction, is an opportunity to promote public policies (Gignon, 2023) in terms of education, health, sports, and inclusion after the OPG. The creation of new heritage sites has been the pillar of the OPG's sustainability model, as stated in the IOC agenda since 1956 (Gammon & Ramshaw, 2014). This is expected to have long-term positive effects on inhabitants and largely offset the negative effects associated with a very expensive and short-lived event. Heritage is the control variable used to enhance the OPG model for the host city.

However, despite the heritage associated with the OPG, the model has suffered from increasing threats with a growing disconnect between the expected and realised economic benefits of hosting the OPG (Scandizzo & Pierleoni, 2017) and the increase in direct and indirect costs for host cities (Müller et al., 2022). Faced with the issue of mega-events (Müller, 2015) characterized by stronger local resistance and the withdrawal of several candidate cities (e.g., Boston, Budapest, Rome, Hamburg, Munich), the strengths of the OPG model seem to be counterbalanced by its weaknesses, notably the financial burden of hosting the games and the difficulties of maintaining the Olympic facilities afterwards. First, local organizational costs have been on the rise: Athens 2004 cost €9 million; Beijing 2008 cost €30 million; London 2012 cost €13 million; and Rio 2016 cost €16 million. Second, there is an increase in hidden indirect costs during the event such as security costs, traffic disruptions, congestion costs, and market disruption. Third, there is a rising risk of "white elephants", those sport structures that put strains on a city and become largely unused after the event.

Figure 1
White elephant from Athens 2004
Source: The author

Fourth, disruption due to the OPG leads to a growing gap between the diffused global benefit and the concentrated local costs in congestion and security for the event—the so-called mega-event syndrome (Müller, 2015). Fifth, there was visible organised resistance from non-stakeholders and passive resistance from the population who "voted with their feet" during the event, with a measured loss of buy-in from the local population. Sixth, the withdrawals of several other candidate cities (e.g., Boston, Budapest, Rome, Hamburg, Munich) precipitated the end of the model, leaving Paris as the only candidate for 2024.

The urgent need to improve was affirmed in the IOC Agenda 2020, where sustainability became a key goal (Zembri & Engrand-Linder, 2023) with a focus on reinforcing more heritage, paying more attention to environmental considerations,

and lowering costs. In the difficult context of converging economic and environmental crises, Paris 2024 took up the challenge of rebuilding a new OPG model that preserved the magic of the event while placing it on a sustainable path by significantly reducing costs, eradicating the risk of the white elephant, and guaranteeing a neutral environmental impact on the local city. To meet this challenge, Paris 2024 articulated the concept of a circular economy by emphasising the use of existing cultural and sports-related heritage sites (Ricordel 2023). This model is opposed to the traditional OPG model, which is linear and has a high potential for waste. The next section aims to highlight the shift that differentiates the Paris 2024 OPG model from older models. To do this, we refer to the London 2012 and Paris 2024 as case studies. Our analysis of qualification and consequences is based on the study of 11 documents made public by the organisers and the main official actors of Paris 2024 and London 2012 by triangulating the data and sources (Denzin, 1978) to understand the main characteristics and identify the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities in the SWOT matrix of Section 3.

2 What is the shift in the Paris 2024 OPG model?

To capture the evolution towards the new regenerated OPG model of Paris 2024, we describe the main characteristics of the two OPG models, the traditional OPG exemplified by London 2012 and the circular heritage OPG Paris 2024.

• The traditional OPG model is linear

The traditional OPG model is based on the creation of a new physical sports heritage site and ambitious urban regeneration projects (Boukas et al., 2015). It is designed as a linear model whereby new infrastructures are built and added to existing but ageing infrastructures. London 2012 showed great promise in terms of local heritage with the regeneration of the Thames Gateway and the many new facilities created in the Stratford area as a part of urban regeneration. The main features are as follows:

1 – Regenerate a disadvantaged area

2 – Most venues are new construction

3 – Concentrating on a large territory

London 2012 OPG created 11 new venues: the Olympic Stadium, Olympic Village, Media Complex, Aquatic Centre, Water Polo Arena, Riverbank Arena, Lee Valley White Water Centre, Olympic Stadium Park BMX, basketball arena, the Copper Box Velodrome, and the Lee Valley Velo Park. Ten new venues (including the Olympic Village and Media Complex) were concentrated in the Stratford area to form the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, a 2.5 km^2 area aimed at regenerating the

Thames Gate to the east of London. This Olympic Park for London 2012 exemplified the traditional linear model with a large investment in new sports and hospitality infrastructure. This park, coupled with a new shopping centre (Westfield Centre) aimed at regenerating the Stratford area, represented the main tangible legacy of the games. The London 2012 Olympic bid was based in part on the vision of creating a lasting legacy for London and the United Kingdom. The legacy objective of the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) has been clearly expressed in the Legacy Action Plan priority: to make the Olympic Park a model of sustainable living through the creation of one of Europe's largest urban parks (250 ha), demonstrating that the UK is a great place to live, work, and do business, and establish the UK as a leading nation in sports. Accordingly, the Thames Gateway, which has been given top priority, is almost eight times the size of the Paris 2024 urban regeneration zone.

- **The Paris 2024 OPG is a circular heritage model**

Paris 2024 calls for a new circular heritage model for future OPGs and has the following characteristics:

1 – Reuse of prestigious sports heritage sites

2 – Use of prestigious cultural heritage sites as sports venues

3 –Decentralisation of sports sites

A circular economy is the opposite of a linear economy, which uses resources and disposes of them as waste (London 2012 did not reuse the London 1948 Olympic Stadium at Wembley). A circular economy is a system in which the continuous use of resources minimises all forms of waste (Lacy et al., 2020). Implementing the concept of circular heritage implies that each system has the potential to become circular (Levoso et al., 2020). In the case of Paris 2024, this involves the adaptive reuse of cultural sites (Foster, 2020; Foster et al., 2021; Rudan, 2023) and sports sites (Wergeland & Hognestad, 2021) as antidotes for excessive spending and accumulation of waste in buildings (Mercader-Moyano, 2017; Charter, 2018).

In other words, the Paris 2024 model is built upon reusing existing cultural and sports heritage facilities. The Seine River will be temporarily used for the opening ceremony, and a number of temporary venues will be also set up at heritage sites such as the Eiffel Tower, Place de la Concorde, Grand Palais, Trocadéro, and Paris City Hall. Sports heritage sites, such as the Stade de France, which hosted the 1998 Football World Cup, will also be used. Overall, 95% of the OPG sites in Paris will be recycled heritage sites, while 5% will be new sites. Compared to the 11 new venues for London 2012, the new venues are limited to four permanent venues: the Olympic Village, Media Cluster, Aquatic Centre, and Arena Porte de la Chapelle. In total, 22 cultural and sporting heritage sites out of 26 sites are reused (85%), with 14 temporary sites located in prestigious heritage sites (63% of valued heritage,

54% of total sites). Regarding sporting events, 42 sports take place in reused venues, while only five take place in new venues. Finally, the regeneration legacy focuses on three areas in the north-east of Paris: the new mixed district “Pleyel-Bord de Seine”, which is 35 ha in Seine-Saint-Denis, the new 25 ha city-park district of Le Bourget (Seine-Saint-Denis), and the regeneration of the Porte de la Chapelle.

Paris 2024 claims a neutral environmental impact at the forefront of its heritage and sustainable development plan: “*Our objective is to halve the emissions linked to the Games, while offsetting even more CO2 emissions than we will generate*.” Paris 2024 placed drastic cost reduction and environmental responsibility as its main objectives, paying close attention to climate and environmental considerations with 100% renewable energy, a circular economy without waste, sustainable food, responsibility digital technology, the development of clean mobility solutions, and the protection of biodiversity and water management of the regenerated Seine ecosystem. The new city-park project in Seine-Saint-Denis is based on a 13-ha regeneration project park, and the new Pleyel-Bord-de-Seine district, a 10-ha green park with 100% bio sourced materials.

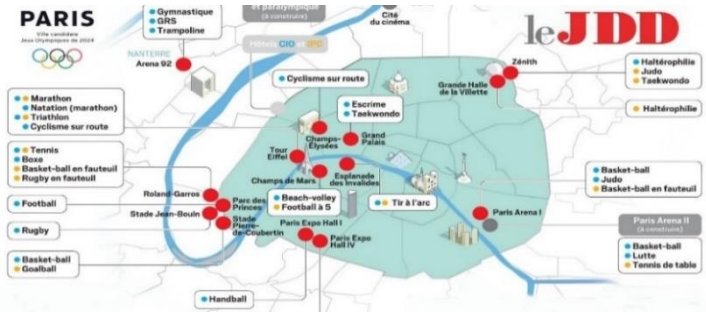

Figure 2
Circular venues in Paris 2024

3 Which consequences? The SWOT approach

The results of the study are presented in the form of SWOT matrices representing the traditional modal model and the circular model of Paris 2024.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
A light spot on a city, a country, with 4 billion TV viewers **An emotional imprint that lasts at least one generation** **Tourist and business attractiveness with an economic multiplier of growth**	**Rising organisational costs** **Rising indirect tangible and intangible costs: security, environment damage, local side-effects during the event**
OPPORTUNITIES	**THREATS**
Creation of sport facilities for the city and country Catalyst effects for big projects that are otherwise politically difficult to initiate Urban regeneration of a disadvantaged neighbourhood	Visible and organised resistance by local non-stakeholders Environmentally unfriendly Lack of candidate cities

Table 1

SWOT matrix for the traditional OPG (Source: Author)

As mentioned in parts 1 and 2, the mega-event is likely to bring numerous benefits to the host city and constitutes a real opportunity to execute otherwise politically difficult projects in the areas of social interest, transport, and inclusion. If we consider the direct negative effects associated with traditional OPG, then we see that the literature highlights the enormous organisational and environmental damage of the OPGs. Of course, indirect costs are also mentioned, but they are offset by the reality of the heritage and legacies after the OPG. Resistance and a lack of candidate cities are strongly associated with cost and environmental factors.

STRENGTHS **A spotlight on a city, a country, with 4 billion TV viewers** **A low-cost organisation (the cheapest in the recent history with 6.6 B€ in constant euros)** **An emotional imprint that lasts at least one generation** **An eco-friendly event**	**WEAKNESSES** **Limited impact in city development** **Limited heritage perspective** **Rising indirect tangible and intangible costs (lack of public support risk)** **More market regulation with short term vision and risk of corruption**
OPPORTUNITIES Catalyst effect for big environmental projects that are otherwise politically difficult to initiate Spreading effects on a larger part of population with decentralisation of sport competition	**THREATS** Visible and organised resistance by local non-stakeholders. Waste of money with no sense decision (clean river seine project = 1 B€) A locked model for potential new candidates No legacy supervision by authority after the OPG (specific to Paris 2024) Eviction effect of tourists with the reuse of cultural heritage

Table 2

SWOT matrix of the Paris 2024 model (Source: Author)

By comparing the two matrices, we observe similarities and differences in each quadrant. It is striking that OPG Paris 2024 response to remedy the weaknesses of the traditional model is to eliminate the high costs and adverse environmental impacts, resulting in an eco-friendly and low-cost event. The circular model reinforces the possible weaknesses of the problematic traditional OPG model while retaining the benefits and magic of the event for the city. However, the factor of tourist and commercial attractiveness disappears because the level of regeneration and new infrastructure is very limited in the circular model. Furthermore, we observe that the indirect material and intangible costs associated with the event also remain high in the circular model due to security and the congested cost of hosting multiple events in the city centre.

When we consider threats, we see the same level of resistance, our study identifies new threats that appear with the circular model. The first and specific choice of decision-makers is the waste of money with the decision to organise a swimming competition in the Seine River. This is a problematic decision since several long-term aquatic complexes could have been built in the same area for 1 billion euros. In the same vein, the decision of the Paris 2024 OCOG not to create a post-match heritage agency (unlike London 2012) will limit the benefits to be expected after the games. More importantly, two threats need to be considered in this model. First, there is an eviction effect with the crowding out of tourists hoping to visit the area due to the inability to move easily from one place to another, which can lead to the risk less visitors. In London 2012, instead of welcoming 300,000 visitors per day, the city only saw 100,000 per day. Second, since the circular heritage model uses existing cultural heritage sites to reduce direct costs, there is a serious threat of eliminating the candidacy of cities with limited cultural heritage. Therefore, there is a 'lock-in' risk that is not consistent with the Paris 2024 motto of "games wide open."

Conclusion

This study analysed the evolution of the OPG mega-event with Paris 2024. The Parisian model is a circular heritage model that aims to "bring home the gold" to the OPG by reducing direct costs and guaranteeing an environmentally friendly event. The new model eliminates the main weaknesses of the traditional model. However, the sustainability of such a model is still questionable because of the eviction effect for tourists and the 'lock-in' effect for future OPG candidacy. When the mega-event occurs in the city centre, it risks creating a ghost city, and when the model is based on pre-existing cultural and sporting infrastructures, the number of potential candidates is reduced, making the games less open, contrary to what the committee in charge of the OPG Paris 2024 claims.

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