

# A QUESTION OF LEGACY

KIKI KAPLANIDOU INVESTIGATES THE LEGACY THAT THE OLYMPIC GAMES CAN LEAVE FOR A HOST CITY AND COUNTRY



THE LEGACY OF THE OLYMPIC GAMES – A HOST COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE

Staging the Olympic Games is certainly a defining moment that leaves a number of legacy outcomes for the host city and country. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has underlined the importance of legacy planning and management before and after hosting an edition of the Olympic Games and highlighted that host cities should focus efforts on the preparation and delivery of the legacies an Olympic Games will leave them.

TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE LEGACIES

Scholars have been researching the legacy phenomenon of an Olympic Games in an effort to measure it more effectively. Legacy has been defined in terms of tangible or intangible "structures" that remain after the event. Tangible structures include infrastructures related to such areas as transportation, sport, tourism and environmental protection, whether newly constructed or merely improved for the event. Intangible structures focus on legacy outcomes ➤

**Left** Families and former volunteers gathering at the Sydney Olympic Park last September to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Games in 2000



such as emotional and psychological impacts, knowledge development and social changes.

A key question that emerges after an Olympic Games is how do legacy outcomes influence the host community's quality of life? This question is of interest because legacy outcomes can evolve over time in terms of their importance for residents, a notion which becomes important for the post-Olympic Games legacy management period.

This "evolution over time" has to be considered in the legacy plans which, as noted in the final official reports of the four most recent summer Olympic Games host cities – Atlanta, Sydney, Athens and Beijing – were progressively more complex and multidimensional. The actual success of the event is another element that is not explicitly viewed as a legacy outcome but should be integrated in the legacy plans. Success is often just taken for granted. However, its importance is demonstrated in the case of the last four summer Games where research showed that event success can positively influence legacy outcome perceptions among local residents. The efforts of the organisers to deliver the Games are thus critical and correlate highly with the legacy planning efforts of the organisation.

To ensure event management and legacy management success it may be necessary to separate the two tasks. This process was successfully operationalised in Vancouver for the 2010 Olympic Winter Games. The host city set up a separate organisation, called "2010 Legacies now", to identify and develop the legacies of the 2010 Games whilst the Organising Committee was tasked with the actual delivering of the Games. The 2010 Legacies had the financial and political freedom to apply legacy plans during and after the end of the Games.

LEGACY AND QUALITY OF LIFE PERCEPTION BY HOST CITY RESIDENTS

According to a recent research study, the legacy outcomes perceived by the host community of the four most recent summer host cities varied and included elements ranging from infrastructure, economics, tourism, environment, knowledge development, sport, culture, emotional, social, health, to political aspects.

For Atlanta, the overall top five ranked legacy outcomes in terms of the importance to the quality of life for the host city residents were: beautification of certain parts of the city, technological upgrades in telecommunications, the Centennial Olympic Park, pride from having hosted the Olympic Games and job opportunities. For Sydney, the top five ranked items were: the promotion of the Australian culture to the world, the ability to use the stadiums constructed for the Games, the wider inclusion of people with disabilities, accessible pathways for strollers and

wheelchairs and pride from having hosted the Games. For Athens, the top ranked items were: the new Athens International airport, the expansion of city's metro system, the expansion of the road network, more wheelchair-friendly buses and the suburban railway. For Beijing, the top ranked items were: new subway lines, expansion of the road network, new options for public transport, the new terminal at Beijing International airport and the suburban railway.

The top five important items noted by the residents of Atlanta and Sydney refer to more intangible components compared to those of Athens and Beijing where the tangible legacies were deemed more important for their quality of life. This pattern of findings can be observed across all the legacy outcome categories and suggests that the recall of information focuses more on the abstract than the concrete outcomes when they are evaluated in the distant past than the recent past. Such observation denotes that time influences the processing of legacy outcomes by residents of host Olympic cities.

The overall positive and negative outcomes influence the host community's perception of having improved their quality of life thanks to the Olympic Games. When residents from Atlanta, Sydney, Athens and Beijing were asked to evaluate the overall satisfaction levels with their quality of life after hosting the Games in their city, three of the four city residents indicated they were fairly satisfied. The only exception was Athens, Greece where the declining economic state in 2010 may have influenced their responses. This stands in comparison to Beijing residents who were the most positive. Atlanta, Sydney, and Beijing were also fairly satisfied in response to another question relating to the evaluation of their city as a place to live. Again, Athens respondents were somewhat dissatisfied and those from Beijing the most optimistic.

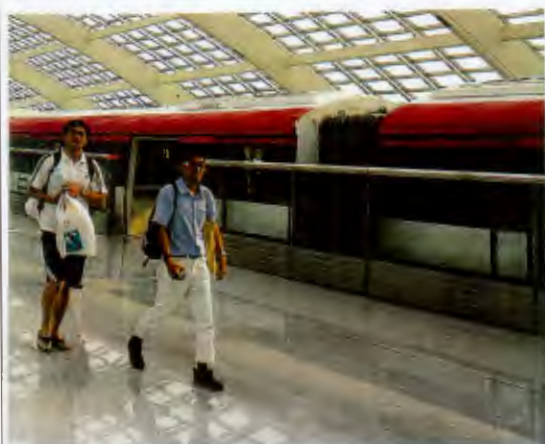
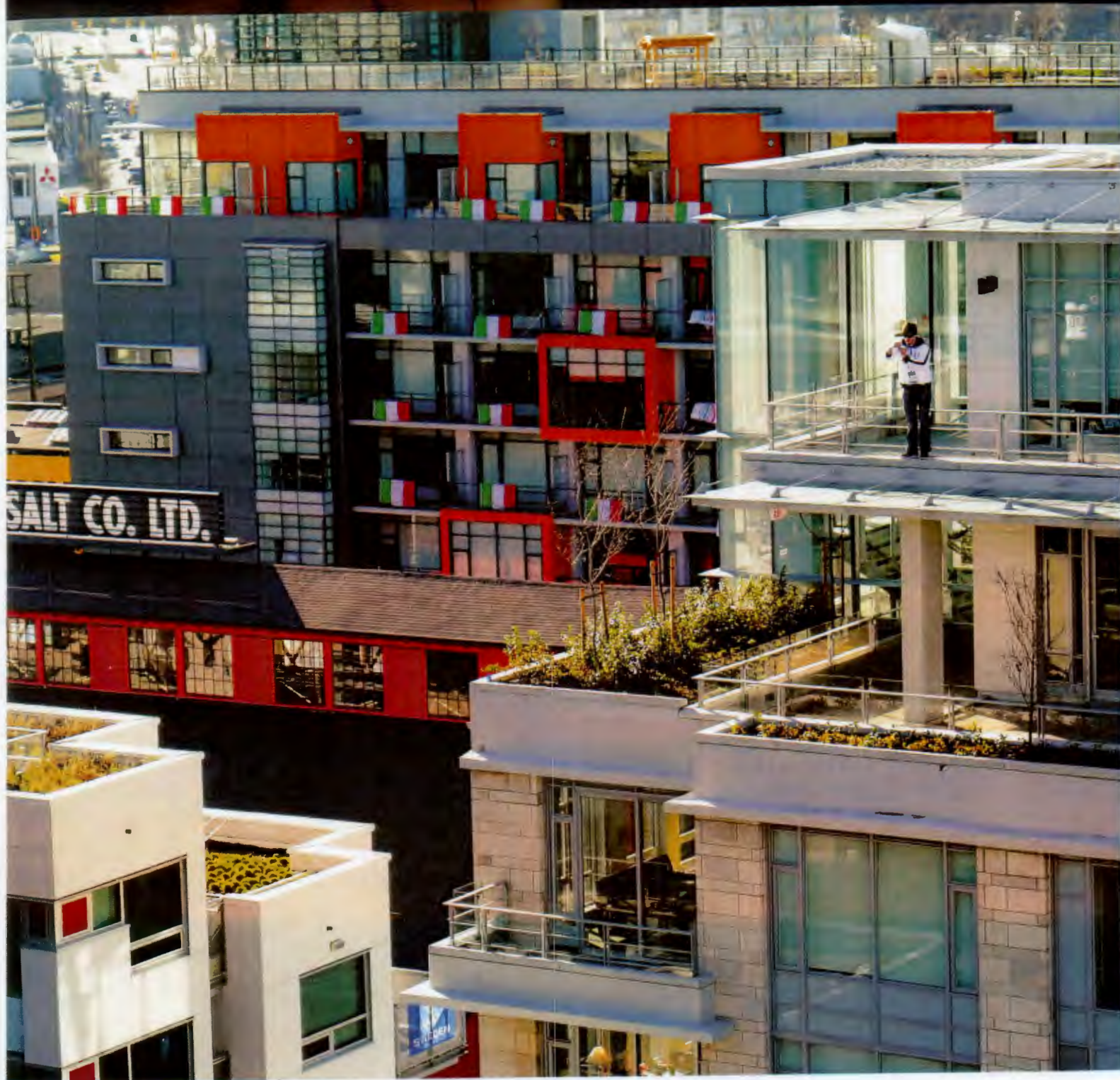
RETAINING A POSITIVE LEGACY PERCEPTION AFTER THE GAMES

According to the research study mentioned above, intangible outcomes are most present in the mid and long-term time frames. In order to retain the positive legacy perceptions brought about by the hosting of an Olympic Games, legacy management programs should focus on maintaining the emotional connection to the event and cultivate further the pride felt from hosting the Games.

This practice can work in parallel with the management of the Olympic Games infrastructure and can be called the additive effect of legacy management, which builds on the most visible aspect of legacy, the infrastructure. If the Games took place in the recent past, the infrastructure and the post-Olympic Games legacy programmes can influence local resident's behaviours and positive legacy perceptions. If the Olympic Games took

Right The Vancouver Athletes Village was converted post-Games into social housing  
Below right The new terminal at Beijing Airport, built for the 2008 Games





place in the more remote past, residents can be more effectively influenced by leveraging intangible components, which are valued even after a number of years.

Olympic Games candidate cities and elected host cities should include in their legacy plans specific actions and efforts aiming to enhance the sustainability of this emotional link. This long term and sustainable approach is particular important to ensure that the younger generations will continue benefiting from the post-Olympic Games tangible and intangible outcomes. ■



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