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THE OLYMPIC GAMES AND NEW SPORT, RECREATION AND LEISURE SPACES FOR THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Abstract. This article is an attempt to understand the changes caused by the organization of the Olympic Games. These changes are creating new places for sports, new recreational spaces and new challenges for the city. In discussing this topic, the author refers not only to scholarly sources and Internet resources, but above all to his field research, which was conducted in cities such as Athens and Barcelona. He also tries to organize and systematize those new places and objects that were created for, or transformed by, the Games. In addition, by supplementing the content with photos and accounts from his own research, the author tries to point out the potential reasons for both successes and organizational failures, which are still visible today in the heritage of the Olympic Games in specific cities.

Keywords: Olympic games, Olympism, urban space, local community.

Introduction

Since the Games are mainly focused on competition between athletes, professional as well as amateurs, their greatest impact is probably on those spheres of life that are most closely connected with sporting activity. Nevertheless, sport is not only activities organized according to specific rules, it is also the large space surrounding it. Thanks to this, a seemingly exclusively sporting event, namely the Olympic Games, is also (perhaps equally) a social and cultural event, affecting the development of sports education, as well as the development of the tourism, recreation and leisure market. Much has already been written about sport as such in the context of the Olympic Games, as well as about Olympic education or the impact of Olympism on cultural, social and intellectual development. In this text, however, I would like to focus on the significant impact that the Games have on urban space that results in the residents of organizing cities being able to take up sports or recreation activities in new places, in a new/different way,

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or in new disciplines. Although this topic is broad, the possibilities of this text are – obviously – limited, so I will focus on sketching the most interesting examples, especially from the initial editions of the Olympic Games, to finally move on to discuss the cases of Barcelona and Athens, which are based on my own field research in these cities.

Definitions and historical context

As we can easily see, the main factors contributing to change in the city's space due to the organization of the Olympic Games are the more or less numerous sports buildings, which often to this day are for us symbols of past struggles persisting in the present. It is worth quoting the definition of Olympic architecture given by Wojciech Zabłocki. According to him, it is a special type of sports architecture which includes “urban objects and architectural events in which they were held, or at which the Olympic Games were to take place” (Zabłocki 2019: 514–515). And although they seem to be the most obvious signs that something new has appeared in the city's body, they are not the only ones. For the purposes of this article, I have allowed myself to divide all these new spaces into three categories that associate them with their only or at least main purpose: leisure, recreation and sport (Diagram 1).

Recreation is, according to the Polish Language Dictionary PWN, “getting rid of tiredness after work or during a break from work” (SJP PWN). And though it might seem that defining rest is unnecessary here, and the word and its meaning are so widely known that they do not need to be explained, it is worth referring to its main meaning. Of course, you can relax in a variety of ways: at home (e.g. in front of the TV or with a book in hand), in nature (e.g. during a picnic) or in the city. This last place is crucial here, because in this text it means a place outside the home, but also not outside the city (in the countryside, in the woods, on the beach). Therefore, it is about urban places and spaces that have been specially created so that they can be used for the purposes of rest and relaxation, and thus spending free time. In the city, above all, this public space is used as a “[...] »cultural area«, [...] a sphere of freedom, where every resident of the city can feel at ease” (Jałowicki, Szczepański 2006: 423). As part of such space, it is possible to distinguish those squares, parks, avenues etc., which were created thanks to the Games, but also existing ones that have been thoroughly modernized because of them. It cannot be denied that such interference occurred in the public space of the cities where the first Olympic Games took place. After all, when building the Neo Phaliron Velodrome or undertaking the reconstruction of the Panathenaic Stadium for the needs of the first modern games in Athens in 1896, the surrounding space had to change as well. And although minor changes in the urban space were not an important topic for analysis at the time, one can find information that the Athe-

nian office spent some money on “repairing roads, planting trees, improving street lighting and cleaning up squares” (Traiou 2016). Also, during the construction of the stadium for the needs of the Stockholm Games in 1912, the surrounding space was revitalized by renovating the streets, establishing lawns, eliminating unnecessary or damaged elements of architecture, and planting a wide variety of vegetation. Thanks to this, a large and friendly park was created for visitors (Bergvall 1912: 204).

Free time can be used in a variety of ways. New spaces created on the occasion of the Olympic Games encouraged (and continue to encourage) residents not only to rest, but also to engage in physical activity. On the one hand, it can be a typical way to improve one’s mood, unload emotions or rest, through partaking in recreational activities *around the stadium* (in alleys, parks, squares), or participating in organized activities within a sports club or a group with common sports interests *at the stadium*.

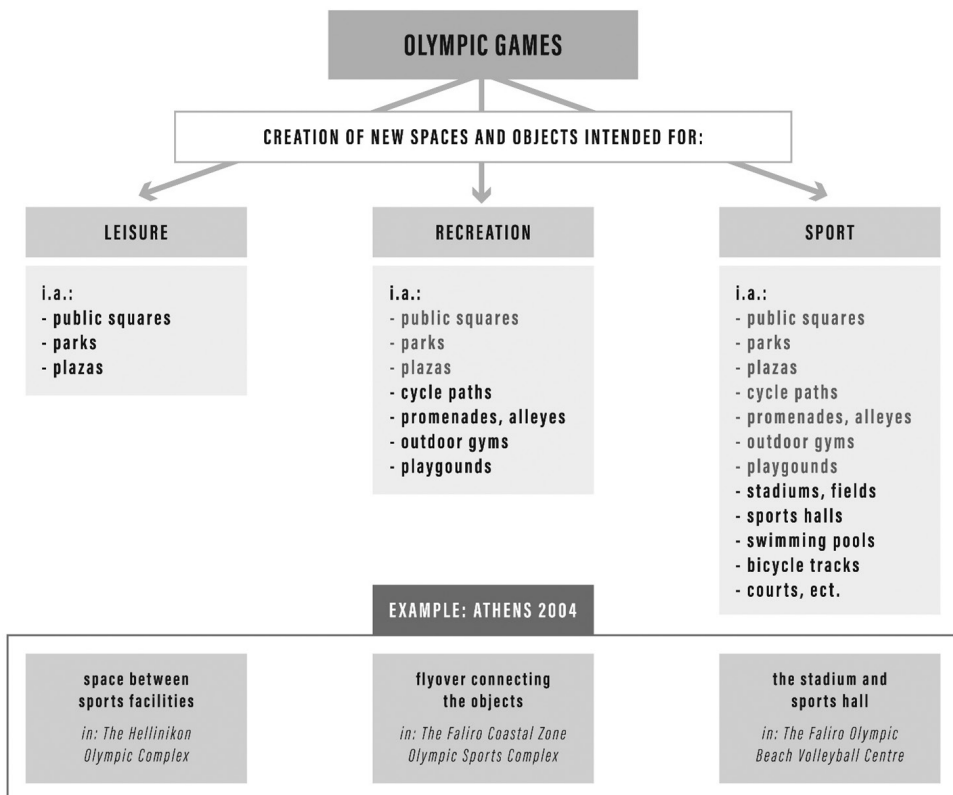


Diagram 1. The creation of the new spaces and objects

Source: Author’s own study.

As Józef Lipiec writes, “sport often covers lower regions – health, ludic and utilitarian, but it is not limited to them. [...] Sport is a natural component of culture” (Lipiec 2014: 42–43), just as the components of culture are objects built for the needs of sport and sports activity as such. In 1936, during the Nazi Games in Berlin, the Third Reich approached this event solely through the prism of its regime’s propaganda and advertising, creating, among other things, the nationwide program *Kraft durch Freude* (Strength through Joy), which was aimed at encouraging the employees of German factories to engage in active rest in nature, of course under the watchful eye of the army and political activists (Baranowski 2001: 213). According to the vision of the Führer, the physically prepared nation was to achieve spectacular results during the games at monumental facilities (Thiel, Huber 2016). It is not necessary to talk about how history unfolded, but some sports facilities, including the Olympic stadium and the surrounding space, are to this day used for sports activities. The social or even political impact on people’s physical activity has long been significant. As Krzysztof Zuchora writes, “The pitch is a state or private theater in which things that are important to players and the audience are happening. [...] [People] oppose wildness and devastating ethical and cultural values that determine the human nature of sport and Olympism” (Zuchora 2018: 171). Thus, from the stadium (and more broadly from every sports arena) good and bad examples of sports competition go out into the world (through the players and the audience). Again, the Olympic Games in Scandinavia were hosted after World War II. They took place in the Finnish capital, Helsinki, in 1952, and to date this remains the smallest city to have organized the Olympics. Since Helsinki was to have been the host of this sporting event as early as 1940, only to be cancelled due to the outbreak of war, the main arena (as well as many others) was ready. Despite this, it was decided to modernize it (after 12 years had passed, and the world, including sports, had advanced), expanding, among other things, the grandstand capacity (Miller 2012: 153). As stressed by its managers, the stadium as an Olympic facility is in constant use (stadion.fi), and its next modernization was planned for 2016–2020, which is to change it into a multifunctional



Photo 1. The view on the Anella Olímpica, Barcelona.

Photo by Adam Omorczyk.



Photo 2. The outer part of the Velòdrom d'Horta, Barcelona.

Photo by Adam Omorczyk.

sports facility. Of course, other sports facilities were built around the stadium – including the main Olympic pool. Everything was connected by a network of roads and avenues leading through the parks. To this day, the largest sports complex in Finland enjoys great popularity among locals and visitors. In turn, in the summer, the aforementioned pool is perfect (Mommo 2013). Almost every subsequent Olympic Games could be described in a similar way. Public spaces were created during the construction of more or less monumental Olympic facilities. However, due to limited space, I want to cover just two more contemporary games. Before I turn to these two examples, it is worth mentioning why I chose to discuss these two cities. Firstly, for reasons of technical and economic feasibility, my research had to be narrowed down to European cities. Secondly, Barcelona and Athens are clear examples of both positive and negative developments. Thirdly, choosing more cities would have entailed exceeding the permissible scope of this article. The field studies carried out in Athens and Barcelona were preceded by an in-depth analysis of existing data, publications, reports, photographs and maps. During the research in each of the cities, all observations and remarks were marked on a properly prepared observation sheet. This resulted in a broader perspective, from which I was able to draw content and knowledge for this text.

Barcelona 1992

The games on Spanish soil turned out to be extremely successful, not only in terms of tourism, city promotion and hospitality, but also in terms of the impact on the urban fabric. Over the years 1986–1995, i.e. during the preparations for the Barcelona Games and in the coming years after their implementation, over 34.72% of the city's public space was modified (Arboix, Martín 2017: 3). This mostly consisted of places around major Olympic venues, concentrated in four areas throughout Barcelona. A total of 43 sports facilities, 44 training places and 19 residential buildings were built or modernized (Official Report 1992 III: 81). It is enough to mention the spacious squares at Anella Olímpica – Olympic Park on Montjuïc hill (Photo 1). To this day, this is a bustling place, full of tourists resting after intensive sightseeing. It is also undoubtedly a place for residents. Above all, however, according to scholars dealing with the subject of public space in Barcelona, the Olympic Games revitalized those areas of the city that were poorly used, neglected and marginal, and restored them to the city and its inhabitants as public places and open to everyone (García-Ramón, Albet 2000: 1332). It is also worth mentioning that – unlike the 2004 Olympic Games – most of the Olympic facilities in Barcelona were built (or were already located) in the vicinity of the city's famous tourist attractions. An example is the already mentioned Olympic Park on Montjuïc hill. The Olympic stadium itself, like the neighbouring Palau Nacional, was built especially for the 1929 World Exhibition. The whole hill and park is full of attractions and places worth visiting. Right next to the

stadium there is also the Juan Antonio Samaranch Olympic and Sport Museum. In addition, there are museums, exhibition halls, numerous paths leading through tree-lined parks, spectacular fountains, etc. Another example worth mentioning is the Velòdrom d'Horta located in Vall d'Hebron (Photo 2). It was the first new facility built for the Barcelona Olympic Games in 1984 (Official Report 1992 II: 233). In its immediate surroundings there are both the Mundet Campus of the University of Barcelona and the famous Parc del Laberint d'Horta. In addition, the shaded area around the facility is conducive to rest for both students and residents of this part of the city, and to engaging in various sports and recreational activities (skateboarding, running, cycling). The last example is the third sports complex, located in the coastal zone – arc de Mar Area. The objects located there are scattered at a greater distance (apart from the marina and the indoor hall Pavelló de la Mar Bella), but also have excellent connections with the nearby parks (including Ciutadella Park), museums and beaches. The organizers also set themselves the goal of creating such easy and above all green connections between sports facilities and public urban spaces, such as the parks or squares mentioned (Official Report 1992 II: 253). In addition to the previously mentioned complexes, seven more were created (so-called single) sports facilities (e.g. the Palau d'Esports in Badalona, the Palau d'Esports in Granollers, the Mollet Shooting Range, the L'Hospitalet Baseball Stadium), and three existing ones were revitalized (e.g. the Terrassa Hockey Stadium or the Nova Creu Alta Stadium in Sabadell) (Official Report 1992 II: 273). Thanks to this, the inhabitants of other districts also gained new places to play sports, and to participate in sports competitions as fans.

Athens 2004

The case of the Greek capital is relatively unique among modern games. First of all, due to the economic conditions of the country, the size of the city, its narrow streets and tourist density. Nevertheless, to the general euphoria of the Greeks, during the election bid historical and emotional considerations prevailed over economic calculations. And although difficulties were expected, and despite the fact that during the preparations the then president of the International Olympic Committee Jacques Rogge expressed his concern about the slow progress (The Guardian Sport 2003), the city managed to organize an efficient and successful event. The existing OAKA Athens Olympic Park was reorganized (gr. *Ολυμπιακό Αθλητικό Κέντρο Αθηνών* “Σπίρος Λούης” OAKA), which, thanks to the bold vision of the Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava, became the focal point of the Games of the 28th Olympiad. Athenian athletes gained a modern, multifunctional stadium (but currently it only fulfils the functions of a football stadium), a modernized indoor sports halls, an indoor velodrome, and a tennis centre together with a main court with roofed stands. Admittedly, only members of sports clubs/



Photo 3. The New Agora at the OAKA, Athens.
Photo by Adam Omorczyk.



Photo 4. A place to relax at the Hellinikon Olympic Complex, Athens.
Photo by Adam Omorczyk.



Photo 5. The overpass at the Faliro Coastal Zone, Athens. Photo by Adam Omorczyk.

schools have access to some of the facilities, but admission to the Olympic swimming pools or tennis courts is also possible for members of the public. Primary and secondary schools also conduct sports activities there. Because the whole complex is in Marousi – a rich business district of Athens, the creation of a modern sports center has become an additional attraction. Excellent connections with the rest of the capital, both through the subway, suburban rail and road network, created an ideal space for recreation, physical activity and rest for the local population. The Modern Agora with its characteristic white arches (Photo 3), numerous ponds with fountains, squares and alleys impressively illuminated at night, were intended to be a place of rest and recreation for residents. After all, their perfectly flat, even surfaces are ideal for various forms of amateur sports – inline skating, cycling, jogging or children’s games. Unfortunately, as is clear from my research carried out in the OAKA complex, its open space, which is not shielded from the fierce Greek sun, is not a great attraction for the Greeks. Rather, they look for shady streets, squares among trees and cool cafes. The climate is not conducive

to using the complex as a place of rest, as in the case of the other two large sports facility complexes. Perhaps the most prominent example of this is the Hellinikon Olympic Complex built on the tarmac of the former airport. The district is full of night clubs and well-maintained beaches, with two indoor halls, a canoeing center and three stadiums for baseball, softball and field hockey. All the huge space around was paved, planted with trees, and several places were created with benches covered with semipermeable roofs (Photo 4). So we have a perfect example of creating a completely new space for both sport (halls, stadiums), recreation (avenues, squares) and rest (benches, indoor places). However, as in the case of the 2004 main Olympic complex, unreasonable planning has also had its effects here, in the form of empty space which is not people-friendly, especially on hot days. Its enormity overwhelms visitors. In addition, this is compounded by the owners' neglect the object – ubiquitous garbage, weeds and destroyed elements of small architecture. In turn, the sports facilities – especially the softball and hockey stadium – are disintegrating before our eyes. In Greece – and especially in Athens, neither of these sports are very popular, which is why from today's perspective the construction of permanent facilities was not a great idea. The third complex of sports facilities is the Faliro Coastal Zone Olympic Sports Complex. This consists of three buildings: the Peace and Friendship Stadium (SEF), existing since 1983, a new beach volleyball stadium, and the indoor the Faliro Sports Pavilion Arena (FSPA) (Official Report 2005: 151–153). The last two facilities are connected by a long esplanade (Photo 5), which connects at FSPA with a wide esplanade traversed by Poseidonos Avenue¹ and the railroad track, leading from the coast into the city. In 2016, a modern cultural center was created at its end, thanks to which walking and cycling came to life in this part of the city (Kalfa, Kalogirou 2017; SNFCC). Unfortunately, this cannot be said for the first path leading from the FSPA to the beach soccer stadium. Since the facility itself has been abandoned and overgrown since the 2004 Games,² the road leading to it is not interesting for potential users. In turn, the area around FSPA is fenced and inaccessible after periods of events organized there. Therefore, apart from sporting activities (SEF, FSPA), all recreational activities have now moved from the Olympic complex to the area around the aforementioned cultural center.

Summary

Over the past one hundred and twenty years, when the world has been accompanied by the revived Olympic Games, a lot of sports facilities have been created, often setting trends in architecture and urban planning. In addition to

¹ A coastal, busy four-lane road connecting Faliro with Glyfada.

² The reason for neglect is similar to the Hellinikon Olympic Complex – no interest in organized/professional beach volleyball practice.

obvious buildings such as stadiums or sports halls, countless smaller and larger facilities accompanying the games were built or modernized, housing training facilities, flats, logistics centers, headquarters of organizational committees, etc. The construction of such buildings brought, and still brings, changes in the surrounding space. The Games were therefore a pretext for the renovation of old, damaged buildings (as in the case of the Panathenaic Stadium or the Estació del Nord Sports Hall), the revitalization of existing facilities that would not meet the expectations of the Games or the organizers' vision (as in the case of the OAKA complex in Athens or the Olympic Stadium in Barcelona) and the construction of completely new buildings from scratch (such as the Olympic Stadium in Stockholm or the Faliro Sports Pavilion Arena). In each of these cases, a new public space was created in the city, which allowed residents and tourists to make use of sports development opportunities, often in completely new disciplines. New places for physical activity and rest cannot be omitted. Contrary to appearances, these are extremely valuable spaces for the city, enabling people to burn energy, to have fun, and to engage in learning and social interactions. Banal conversations on a bench in a park alley are the best proof that the city is teeming with life. Trivial walks can be important both from the city's point of view and that of a walker, because the walk "[...] introduces a set point of view into urban space" (Duda 2018: 146). Time spent outside of your own apartment, house, block or tenement can be spent in many ways – including those related to physical activity. Józef Lipiec notes that "along with the progressing urbanization, the pressure of environmental lifestyles also increased, gradually creating the foundations for urban leisure culture" (Lipiec 2018: 55). The Olympic Games undoubtedly create new opportunities for city dwellers to be able to take part in their favorite sports competitions, use their free time for recreational activities, to have fun and take a much needed rest. There is no doubt, however, that these options are not always used in the right way. Of course, this does not apply to the potential users of these places, but rather concerns the processes preceding construction. The meetings of planners, architects and urban planners with organizational committees, city authorities or the creators of specific ideas, turn out to be the key moment. The planning process should be preceded by in-depth research that will allow one to predict whether a given object in a particular place will be an enduring success after the Olympic torch is extinguished, or whether the construction should be of a more temporary nature, so that it does not become another ruin that discourages rather than attracts people. A properly carried out planning process can protect future organizers from the failures of their predecessors, but it can also be a catalyst for positive changes in urban space, which will not only change it, but also make it more people-friendly, thanks to which everyone will benefit.

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IGRZYSKA OLIMPIJSKIE A NOWE PRZESTRZENIE DLA SPORTU, REKREACJI I WYPOCZYNKU LOKALNEJ SPOŁECZNOŚCI

Abstrakt. Niniejszy artykuł jest próbą swego rodzaju rozeznania w temacie zmian, powodowanych przez organizację Igrzysk Olimpijskich. W ramach tych zmian powstają nowe miejsca do uprawiania sportu, nowe przestrzenie rekreacji i nowe wyzwania dla miasta. Omawiając ten temat, autor odwołuje się nie tylko do źródeł książkowych czy zasobów internetowych, ale przede wszystkim do swoich badań terenowych, które wykonane zostały m.in. w Atenach i Barcelonie. Stara się on także uporządkować i usystematyzować nowe miejsca i obiekty, które powstały lub zostały przeobrażone pod wpływem Igrzysk. Dodatkowo, uzupełniając treść o zdjęcia i relacje z własnych badań, autor próbuje wskazać na potencjalne powody zarówno sukcesów, jak i porażek organizacyjnych, które uwidaczniają się po dziś dzień w dziedzictwie Igrzysk Olimpijskich w konkretnych miastach.

Słowa kluczowe: igrzyska olimpijskie, olimpizm, przestrzeń miejska, lokalna społeczność.