

Megaevents bidding as urban development planning: failure as catalyst?

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While the urban impacts of megaevents are most visible in host cities, megaevent planning has a wider, subtler impact in cities that unsuccessfully bid to host events. In Olympic planning, for instance, each host city competition attracts several candidates; many of these cities go on to implement components of their Olympic plans even if no hosting contract is secured. This paper argues that megaevent bidding should be interpreted as an ongoing urban governance process, which draws on a variety of events and bids. Within individual cities, many planning coalitions field multiple unsuccessful megaevent bids before securing a hosting contract, and often use one event plan as a template for bidding to host other types of megaevents. Drawing on archival records from bid committees and municipal governments, this paper analyzes a sample of 80 Olympic bids from 57 cities, from 1992-2012 (bids to host Summer and Winter Games from 2000-2020). The analysis maps institutional connections, financial links, and overlapping design plans between these bids (and non-Olympic megaevent bids where appropriate), both longitudinally (within the same cities) and comparatively (across the global sample of cities). In doing so, the paper demonstrates that megaevents planning should be interpreted both as a temporary planning project, and as part of long term planning strategies. This interpretation presents opportunities for megaevents research by extending analysis beyond individual events, considering the role of ‘failed’ megaevent bids (which fail to secure hosting rights) in longer term urban development planning.

1) Introduction

In September 2013, the *Tokyo 2020 Bid Committee* secured a contract to host the 2020 Summer Olympic Games. In securing this contract from the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the bid committee and its public-private partners are now able to implement their USD 4.35 billion investment plan, and will benefit from nearly a decade of access to global networks of expertise on urban planning for ‘megaevents’ like the Olympics. However, the election of Tokyo as host city left behind four other competitor cities (Baku, Doha, Istanbul and Madrid). Bid committees representing these cities also developed extensive, high-quality urban planning proposals. The fate of these plans is often unknown, but unsuccessful bids like these represent the majority of Olympic urban planning on a global scale.

While there is a robust scholarship on legacy planning in host cities, less is known about long-term planning outcomes in unsuccessful bidding cities. While the impact of ‘event-led development’ catalysts are most visible in cities that actually host events, host city planners are by no means alone in using a pending event to facilitate development planning. The broader geography of Olympic planning – not just in host cities, but in the much broader range of cities that invest in a bid proposal – shows that even failed Olympic bids can have significant long

term implications for public finance, land use planning, and development policymaking. Globally, the urban development ‘footprint’ of Olympic planning is much larger than that in the host cities. In fact, 57 cities placed 80 bids to host Summer or Winter Olympic Games between 2000 and 2020 (Figure 1), and many went on to implement part of their bid proposals even though the bids were unsuccessful.¹ As such, there is a pressing need to understand the urban development implications of these unsuccessful bids, and to design strategies for ensuring that even unsuccessful bids produce positive urban legacies.

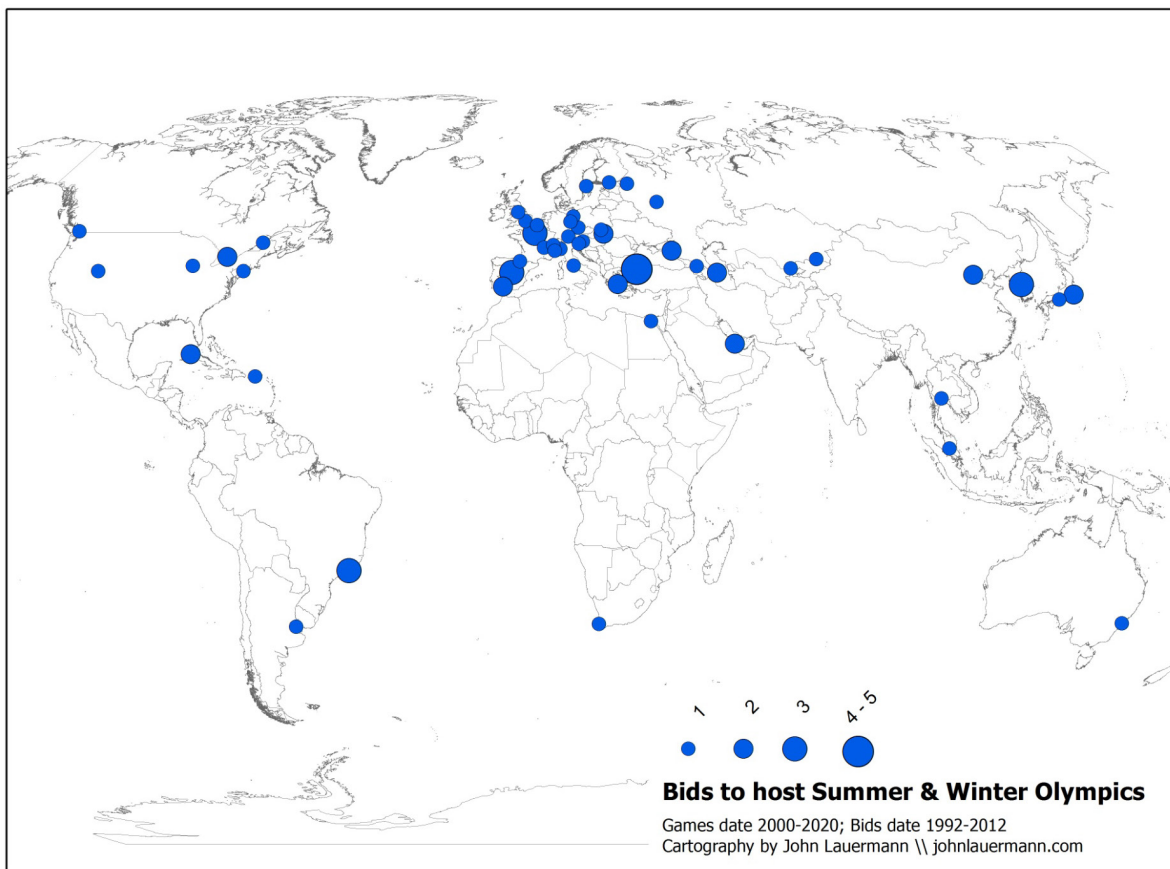


Figure 1: Bids to host Summer and Winter Olympic Games

Bids for Games 2000-2020, with bid competitions dating 1991-2013

Map includes 48 bids from 33 cities to host the Summer Games, and 23 bids from 24 cities to host the Winter Games

¹ Lauermann, John (April 2014) “Legacy after the bid? The impact of bidding to host Olympic Games on urban development planning” *Olympic Studies Centre Working Papers Series*, forthcoming on doc.rero.ch

Olympic (and other megaevent) bids are curious moments in urban politics: bidders devote immense technical effort to planning the event and its impact on the aspiring host city, but these plans are often inaccurate (at best) or deceptive (at worst). Analysts from across the political spectrum have shown that when Olympic bids ‘win’ – when a city is awarded an Olympic hosting contract – they almost always run over budget, produce neutral or negative regional economic impacts, and promise ‘legacy’ programs which often falter in the long run (Boykoff, 2014b, Maennig and Richter, 2012, Flyvbjerg and Stewart, 2012, Porter and Chin, 2012). Yet for all their inaccuracy, these bids form the basis for event-led development planning. If a city wins its bid, that bid serves as a legally binding document which the International Olympic Committee (IOC) aggressively enforces.² And if the bid fails, it often acts to catalyze urban land investment, as some parts of the bid plan are implemented anyway (Section 2). While I am not aware of any comparative studies of failed Olympic bids (aside from my own), large-scale land use impact of ‘failed’ bids has been observed in Berlin (Alberts, 2009), Doha (Scharfenort, 2012), Istanbul (Erten, 2010, Bilsel and Zelef, 2011), New York (Moss, 2011), and Toronto (Oliver, 2011).

Thus despite their limitations, megaevent bids are significant moments in urban politics and analyzing them provides a window into the role of megaevents planning as a form of global urban policymaking. To explore these moments, I draw on a comparative analysis of land investments proposed in bids to host the Summer and Winter Olympics, between 2000 and 2020. I assess institutional stakeholders, financing, and land use planning in these bids comparatively (across cities) and longitudinally (across bids within the same city).³ Taking a longer term view of the broader geography of Olympic planning suggests that bidders operate on a logic which accounts for – and capitalizes on – both ‘success’ and ‘failure’ in the bidding process (defining both terms loosely, and recognizing that they are not mutually exclusive). For many bidders, ‘winning’ a bid is often less important than leveraging a bid as part of a long-term, multi-bid strategy for pursuing event-led development. Bid ‘failure’ is thus an integral

² Interview with director of IOC host city plan enforcement, 20 August 2013

³ Suffice to say, this draws on a broader study that includes a comparative analysis bid archives, 26 key informant interviews (with megaevents consultants, local planners, and program officers in international sports federations [especially the IOC and FIFA]), and two city-specific case studies (on a failed bid to host the 2012 Games in New York City, and on repeated attempts – successful and failed – by bidders in Qatar to host megaevents like the Olympics, World Cup, and Asian Games).

component of this longer term process, and in the argument that follows I unpack the dynamics of failure in urban governance.

2) Megaevents as catalytic moments

Hosting a sports ‘megaevent’ like the Olympic Games is often discussed as a means to ‘catalyze’ urban development by building political support, designing unique funding models for otherwise unfeasible projects, and securing various regulatory concessions (Burbank et al., 2002, Black and Peacock, 2011, Gold and Gold, 2008, Smith, 2012). However, there is relatively less comparative or long-term analysis of this phenomenon: Individual events are undoubtedly catalytic moments in urban development, but they should also be interpreted through the lens of long term urban politics. My comparative research contributes to the conversation by tracking bid outcomes: across bids within the same city, and the impacts of bids that failed.

The megaevent-as-catalyst is generally viewed in one of two ways: as a project leveraged by urban growth coalitions or as an outlet for the ambitions of developmental states. The first framing is associated with conversations on place competition and growth coalitions, often (but not always) in cities of the Global North. Drawing on urban regime theory (Burbank et al., 2002, Cochrane et al., 1996), this group of analysts has long signaled the ways in which urban growth coalitions leverage megaevents to open investment opportunities or bring public assets under private control. Thus both local (Hiller, 2000) and ‘selectively transnationalized’ (Surborg et al., 2008) growth machines are able to articulate their real estate projects through the language of urban regeneration (Smith and Fox, 2007) or place branding (Zhang and Zhao, 2009, Gold and Gold, 2008). The paradigmatic example of this framing is the notion of a ‘mega-event strategy’ for catalyzing local development, such that

City leaders see the Olympic Games in strategic terms, providing opportunities to gain regional, national, and international media exposure at low cost. Even submitting a bid package to the national Olympic committees is enough to warrant media exposure and provide some claim to Olympic symbols to unify disparate stakeholders, however transitory these claims may be. The mega-event strategy also provides a clear timeline for development projects. Even though the promise of the Olympics does not eliminate regulatory requirements for planning, the Olympics are prestigious enough to force quick decisions. In the face of an increasingly complicated politics

of development, this can be an important incentive to adopting this strategy. (Andranovich et al., 2001)

A second group of scholars have discussed megaevents as local catalysts for realizing national development ambitions, as national institutions implement programs on a smaller scale. This type of national-to-urban downscaling is well documented: in an era of state decentralization, urban spaces figure prominently in national spatial strategies (Brenner, 2004) though the degree to which this reflects a will to decentralize or a simple inability to reach all of state territory is hotly contested (Cox, 2009, Ferguson and Gupta, 2002). Thus megaevents analysts have signaled to the role of megaevents as an urban-scale catalyst for developing national identity through modernization campaigns and claims on 'world class' city status (Zhang and Zhao, 2009, Scharfenort, 2012, Cornelissen, 2004). The broader point is that while megaevents are still catalytic moments, the development strategies which they portend operate on a different logic (Müller, 2011). For example, commenting on strong-state development models which rely on large budget, nationally driven events, Black and Peacock suggest

sport mega-events have held a distinctive kind of appeal for a succession of 'developmental states' in Asia. We argue that there are characteristic features of the political economy of developmental states, and of mega-events themselves, that have made these events particularly appealing to the political elites of these countries. Moreover, because of these characteristic features and the resulting appeal of mega-event hosting, a different kind of calculus of costs and benefits has applied in these cases, tied not to a more narrowly economic or material calculation of projected gains (however illusory these may be in practice), but to a longer-term and more symbolic calculus of repositioning and re-imagining the country in the global hierarchy of states. (Black and Peacock, 2011)

In both readings, the megaevent is conceptualized as a catalyzing moment in urban development: a project – rendered unique in its large scale and highly circumscribed temporality – which drives forward a development strategy. The broader logic of the strategies inevitably vary from one event to another, but the basic conceptualization of the process – as a fixed-term moment which catalyzes a more durable, long-term outcome – is consistently referenced in urban studies scholarship on megaevents. These framings of megaevents as catalyst obviously apply to events that are actually hosted (which is not to say that they necessarily achieve their urban development objectives). However, the outcomes of 'failed'

megaevent planning projects – in cities that have not ever secured a hosting contract, and in those cities which made unsuccessful bids before becoming a host city – are less clear.

3) Implementation in failure

As a policy objective, urban ‘development’ necessarily implies long-term institutions and durable outcomes – some form of policymaking ‘success’ (very broadly defined, with the recognition that ‘success’ in one aspect of the project does not necessarily translate to other project subcomponents). Much of the work of actually implementing it, however, is accomplished through policymaking experiments: speculative investments, exploratory strategies and statements of development ‘vision’, pilot projects, and temporarily ‘special’ spaces within the city (e.g. business improvement districts). Development studies scholars have explicitly recognized this process of transition from temporary experiment to durable outcome, both assessing challenges of managing development policy experiments (Rondinelli, 1993, Thomas, 1996, Brett, 2003) and noting the frequent (and often spectacular) failures of modernist planning experiments in international development (Scott, 1998, Goldman, 2005, Chambers, 2008, Easterly, 2001). Discussions of the transition from experiment to outcome are less explicit in urban studies scholarship, but notable exceptions can be found in recent analysis of cities’ experiments with ‘world class’ planning practices (Roy and Ong, 2011, Goldman, 2011, Ponzini and Rossi, 2010) and the role of cities as urban laboratories for testing ‘smart city’ and other urban management technologies (Karvonen and van Heur, 2014, Gibbs et al., 2013).

Experiments imply a high likelihood of ‘failure’ in urban development planning. However, this failure is often quite productive: experiments in urban development are by definition concerned with testing policy tools, and abandoning those which are ineffective. There is, however, relatively little scholarship on the dialectics of success and failure in urban development planning: most importantly for my discussion, there is a need to understand the implications of ‘failed’ urban development experiments. Specifically, my research explores the impacts of unsuccessful megaevent bids, cataloguing the land investment outcomes of these failed bids, and parsing why (institutionally and politically) some projects are pursued even after a bid fails.

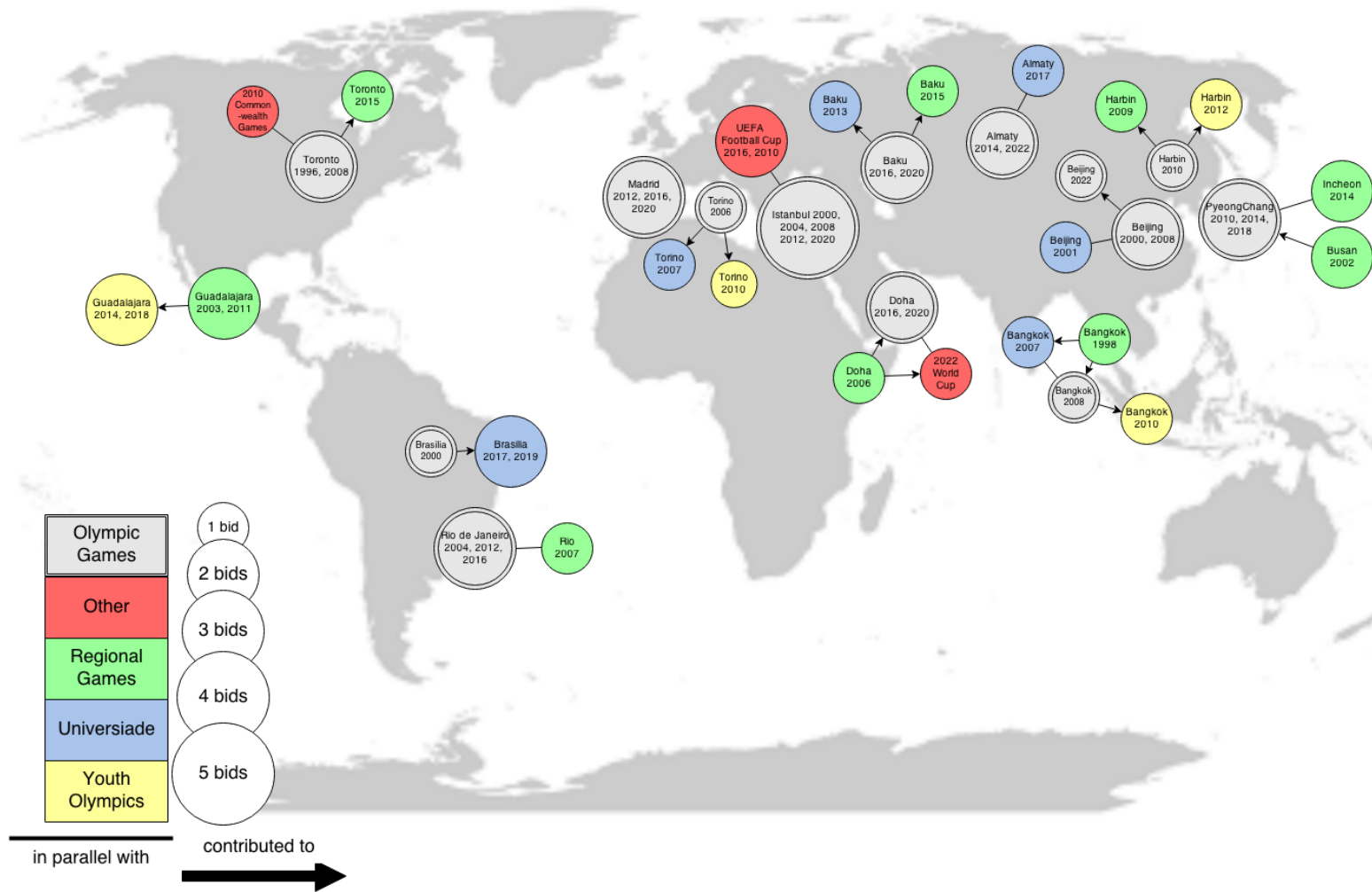


Figure 2: High frequency megaevent bidders

Bids to host urban-based major international sporting events; bids data 1991-2013 for events 1996-2022

My argument is that failed bids are central to megaevents planning, and indeed for many bidders ‘winning’ the bid is often less important than leveraging it (regardless of its success or failure) in longer-term development strategies. The prevalence of ‘high frequency bidders’ – coalitions that bid for the Olympics and/or other megaevents multiple times – would suggest that securing a particular event hosting contract is only one of several objectives pursued by bid coalitions (Figure 2). While an Olympic hosting contract is a high profile success, city-scale bidders also routinely pursue a variety of specialty events (Commonwealth Games, World Student Games, Youth Olympic Games) and regional multi-sport events hosted by Olympic continental associations (All Africa, Asian, European, and Pan American Games). The planning histories vary city to city, but Olympic bids often provide the basis for these multi-event bidding strategies. Many of the other sports federations base their host bidding protocols on those used by the IOC (e.g. even Commonwealth Games, which are not Olympic-affiliated, use the same template for bidding documents); likewise, many bid committees draw on the same network of consultants and experts who advise Olympic bidders.⁴ Over the study period (1991-2013) 109 metropolitan coalitions placed a total of 170 bids to host one or more of these events (usually, though not always, sponsored by the same municipal government). 14 of these coalitions were particularly active, planning three or more bids on multiple types of events; an additional 27 cities bid at least twice.

These bids typically draw on local development priorities that are tied to the bids, but not contingent upon them succeeding. Thus the land investment proposed therein may often happen even if the bid ‘fails’. Most obviously, this occurs because bidders tend to claim ongoing, marginally-related land investments in their bid budgets in an effort to increase the overall attractiveness of the proposal.⁵ This is seen prominently in transportation investment budgets proposed by Olympic bidders: the transportation projects that bidders claim on their balance sheets are often planned prior to the bid itself. While bids can catalyze local support for transportation projects, they are often institutionally and financially separate from the bid itself.

⁴ Lauermaun (working paper), “Competition through inter-urban policymaking: bidding to host megaevents as entrepreneurial networking”; under review in *Environment & Planning A*, though please feel free to contact me at jlauermaun@clarku.edu for a copy

⁵ Lauermaun 2014, *ibid* note 1

While the mean land investment expenditure proposed in the sampled bids (Figure 1) is \$9.3 billion, large budget outliers are often driven by the inclusion of ongoing transportation projects.⁶ In the bids to host the 2020 Summer Olympics, for instance, the bid on behalf of Doha (Qatar) included \$50.25 billion in road, port, and rail projects already funded through a national development master plan.⁷ The budget ratio between transportation and all other land investment projects (primarily sports venues, the Olympic Village athletes' housing complex, and media/convention centers) is telling: on average only 44.3% of bid budgets are devoted solely to transportation projects (Figure 3).

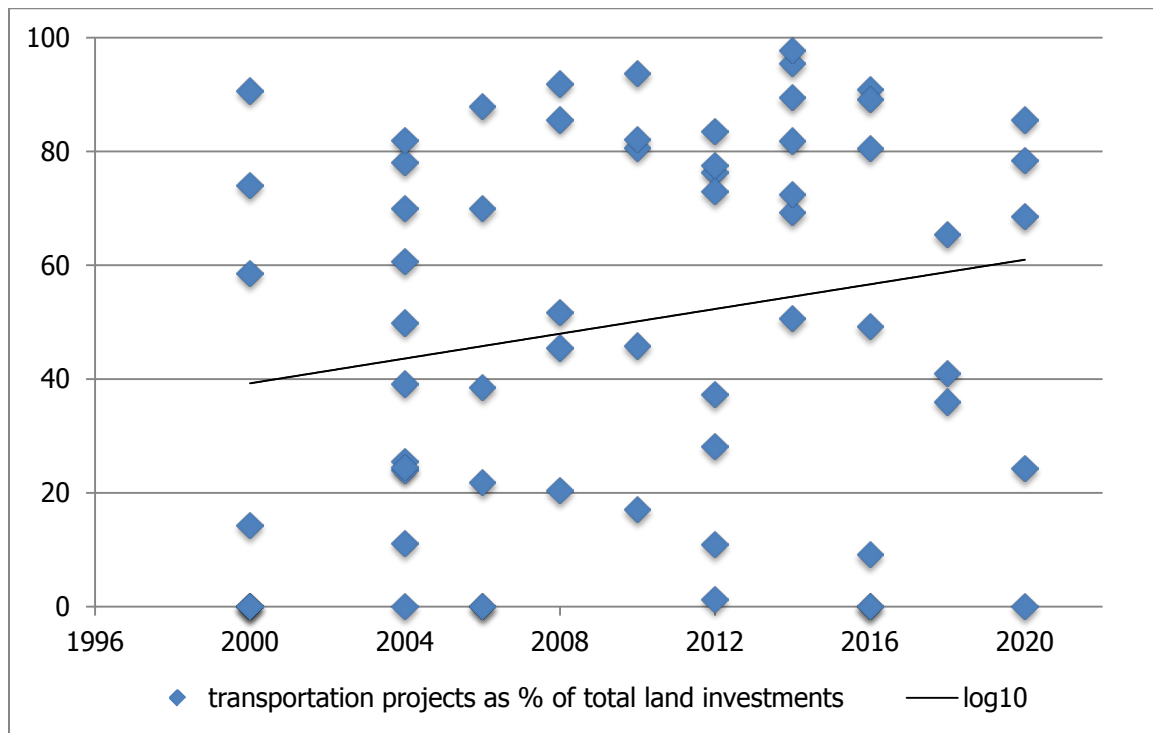


Figure 3: Land investment budgets in the bids: how specific to the event itself?

Transportation projects Non transportation projects (venues, Olympic Village, and media centers) as a percent of total land investment budgets; n =64

Even within the Olympic-specific land investment categories (sports venues, Olympic villages, and media centers) some of the projects are planned regardless of a bid's success or failure.

⁶ All financial values are inflation adjusted to USD 2012, unless otherwise noted.

⁷ Lauermaun, John (20 June 2012) "Doha's failed Olympic bid", *Jadaliyya*

<<http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/6081/dohas-failed-olympic-bid>>; see also Scharfenort (2012)

While the prevalence of ‘additional’ or ‘Games-contingent’ projects obviously varies, on average 27% of these Olympic-specific projects were ongoing at the time of the bid (Figure 4).

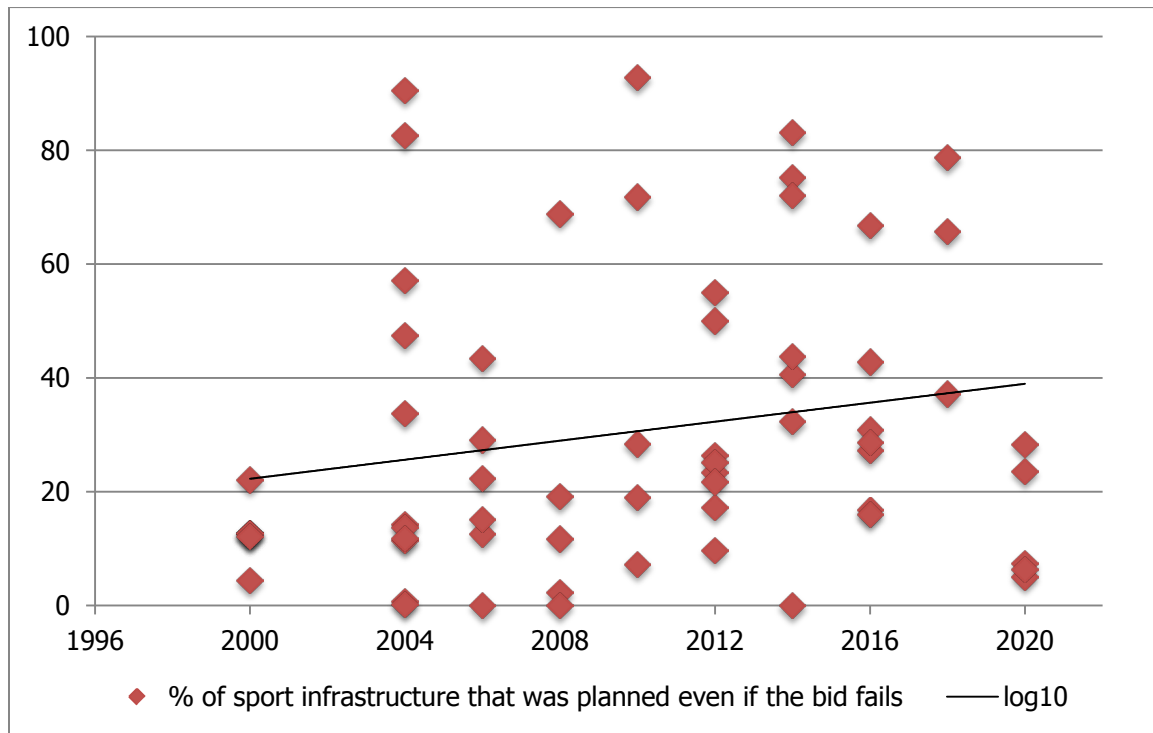


Figure 4: Land investment budgets in each bid - would it happen anyway?

Based on proposed investment in sports venues, Olympic villages/athlete housing, and media centers; n = 64

So why bid if many of the site investment projects are going to happen anyway? The answer is found in interpreting the productive nature of urban policy ‘failure’. Olympic bids play a formalizing role in development planning: designing site plans, building political coalitions, and securing lines of funding for individual projects. This is seen prominently in an unsuccessful bid on behalf of New York City to host the 2012 Summer Olympics. The Olympic planning coalition originally formed to bid for the 2008 Games, conducting a feasibility study in 1996 but delaying the bid until the 2012 Olympic cycle (2003-2005).⁸ *NYC2012, Inc.* was officially incorporated in 1999 as a non-profit organization, representing a diverse growth coalition. Over the course of the feasibility study and the bid writing projects, the committee raised \$11.1

⁸ NYC 2008 *Detailed Site Analysis* (December 1996), NYC 2012 records at the New York Municipal Archives, folio ID NYC2012/Gonzales/box 2/folder 18

million from corporations, unions, and charitable foundations (including a \$900,000 personal donation from the bid chairman, an executive at Wall Street private equity firm).⁹ Various public-private partnerships were established to finance most of the construction, and shortfalls in the \$9.4 billion capital investment budget were guaranteed by the City of New York. The bid focused on event-led redevelopment of post-industrial sites, along the East and Hudson river waterfronts and in ‘the yards’, rail-yards at the ends of subway lines which could be downsized and/or covered by overlying venues. The bid committee linked these redevelopment sites to a broader urban vision of increased cross-city connectivity via public transportation. They branded this as the ‘Olympic X’, a design concept in which investment sites were planned over southeast and southwest subway corridors and hubs such that:

The Olympic X Plan positions nearly every venue along two intersecting routes that run east-west across the city and north-south along the East River. Six sites along the Olympic X will host 85% of spectators, minimizing the impact on the regional transportation system. The Olympic Village will sit at the center of the Olympic X, within 10 km (6.2 mi) of all three primary sports clusters.¹⁰

The bidders were thus able to capitalize on long-term, but largely stalled, redevelopment projects. The main redevelopment sites were owned by public urban development corporations – subsidiaries of the *Empire State Development Corporation*, the New York State government’s economic development agency. Each of these corporations had been created in preceding decades to redevelop individual post-industrial sites. The projects had largely stalled, and the Olympic bid was a means to finalize site plans and line up financing. For example, in 2001 the Mayor’s office asked the bid committee to take over site design for the Hudson Yards project on the lower west side of Manhattan; while the Olympic plan had always included several facilities in that neighborhood, the bid committee fundraised and spent over \$500,000 to redesign the entire 30-block zone.¹¹ As a result, most of the major investment projects have subsequently been pursued (Table 1)

⁹ NYC 2012 (various years), *Bid committee fundraising reports*, NYC 2012 records at the New York Municipal Archives, folio ID NYC2012/Clough/box 1/folders 11-26

¹⁰ NYC 2012 (2003) *NYC 2012 Olympic Candidature File*, v1 p 23

¹¹ *Bid Committee Fundraising Reports*, note 18

Table 1: Municipal development projects anchoring the New York Olympic master plan

Constructed from municipal planning documents, construction records, and *NYC 2012, Inc.* archives; investment budgets in original values (2004 USD)

Investment site	Pre-bid use/plans	Anchor project in Olympic bid (2004)	Post-bid outcomes (as of 2014)
<i>At the center of the 'X'</i>			
Hunters Point (Queens)	Former industrial site; rezoned for mixed-use development in 1984 and Queens West Development Corporation (QWDC) founded in 1990	Olympic Village; (\$1.652 billion funded by QWDC)	½ of the site sold back to the City in 2006 for a housing project (2006-2014); remainder to be redeveloped by QWDC
<i>Along the East-West axis</i>			
Hudson Yards (Manhattan)	Municipal subway rail yard; rezoned for mixed-use development in 1993	New stadium (\$1.542 billion, funded by the City and New York Giants football franchise); City requested the Olympic bidders to design the entire site plan in 2001	Hudson Yards Development Corporation founded in 2005; mixed-use development over the rail yards ongoing
Flushing Meadows park (Queens)	Municipal park; hosted 1940 and 1965 World's Fairs, US National Tennis Centre, and a municipal stadium	New aquatic center (\$65.2 million, funded by City government); emergency new stadium plan the Hudson Yard stadium coalition dissolved in 2005 (bid failed before design was completed)	Aquatic center/ice rink constructed by the City (2008); replacement stadium constructed by City government and New York Mets baseball franchise (2006-2009)
<i>Along the North-South axis</i>			
Bronx riverfront	Professional baseball stadium, former industrial site, and municipal park	New velodrome/arena (\$76.5 million, funded by City government)	Not completed
Atlantic Yards (Brooklyn)	Municipal subway rail yard	New multi-purpose arena (\$657.6 million, funded by New York State development corporation)	Arena constructed by the Atlantic Yards Development Corporation (2007-2012); remainder of mixed-use redevelopment ongoing

4) Implications and conclusions

While there is a robust scholarship on legacy planning in host cities (see reviews in Smith, 2012, Kassens-Noor, 2013, Pillay and Bass, 2008, Liao and Pitts, 2006), less is known about long-term planning outcomes in unsuccessful bidding cities. The broader geography of Olympic planning – not just in host cities, but in the much broader range of cities that invest in a bid proposal – shows a record of failed Olympic bids making long term impacts on urban development. Thus despite their many limitations, megaevent bids are significant moments in urban politics, and analyzing them provides a window into the role of megaevents in urban policymaking. My analysis of host and bid cities demonstrates that bidders operate on a logic which accounts for – and capitalizes on – both ‘success’ and ‘failure’ in the bidding process (defining both terms loosely, and recognizing that they are not mutually exclusive). For many bidders, ‘winning’ the bid is often less important than developing a political coalition in support of (i) individual land investment projects and (ii) a broader event-led development strategies.

This implies that the urban politics of the megaevent happen relatively early in the planning process, during the bid. For critical geographies of megaevents, the preceding argument contributes by identifying political moments for laying claim to Olympic planning. Pressing questions emerge as to why megaevents bidding has gained and maintained prominence within urban development policymaking circles. A widening ideological gap between bidders’ rhetoric about development and the pragmatic challenges of megaevent planning is clear, as evidenced by the anti-Olympic social movements which arise in many host cities (Boykoff, 2014a, Boykoff, 2011) and documented through a host of econometric critiques on ever-ballooning planning budgets (Preuss, 2004), cost overruns (Flyvbjerg and Stewart, 2012), and conceptual dishonesty in megaevents planners’ economic impact modeling (Maennig and Richter, 2012, Matheson, 2006). A cynical reading of the issue would suggest that as globally-attuned local elites (Surborg et al., 2008, Hiller, 2000), megaevents planners are simply unconcerned with the widening disconnect between the development they promise and the failed development experiments they so often deliver. Mark Davidson and I (2013) have argued that megaevent planning politics are tied to deeply-rooted growth agendas, and that the institutional hybridity of megaevent planning coalitions makes these agendas easier to pursue (hybridity in a geographic sense,

across multiscalar stakeholders, and in a temporal sense, through temporary and experimental projects). Megaevents planners are insulated from public critique by elaborate subcontracting networks which lock in cities to the narrow planning purviews described in the bids (Raco, 2014) and are subsidized through public-private partnerships which allocate risk to the public sector and profit to the investors and sponsors (Boykoff, 2014b).

A sense of inevitability thus runs through many critiques: in many cases, local activism which reacts to Olympic construction is too late to contest the visions of planning elites (Eick, 2010, Boykoff, 2011). This does not have to be the case: my analysis has shown that the bid itself is central to the subsequent politics of the Olympic city. Timing matters greatly in Olympic urban politics since the window of opportunity for deliberating if and how an event should be used in urban development is both narrow and roving. At the early stages of planning, a relatively diverse local coalition is possible and necessary. Bids can and do fail in the face of local opposition, which the sponsors and international sports federations often view as public relations risks. After a city secures an Olympic hosting contract, however, the coalitions rapidly shift into a rigid implementation model (Raco, 2014). Interpreted through the lens of Jacques Rancière's (1998, 2006) democratic theory, Olympic bids are the moment for defining the 'distribution of the sensible' in the politics of the city – the places and actors which have a voice in the planning process. Subsequent attempts to contest that distribution are ironically 'post'-political in ways that mirror Rancière's (not specifically historical) sense of the term: the temporary window of opportunity for contestation is closed by a technocratic imperative to deliver the promises of the bid book. A significant solution is to use the bid writing process as a political platform, both to leverage that window of opportunity and to contest the ongoing land investments that are supported by the bid but will continue even if it fails.

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