

Sustainable Urban Development and Mega-Events

The impacts of Olympic Agenda 2020 in Future Olympic Legacies



Introduction Over the last two decades, public opposition against the Olympic Games has risen, triggering protest campaigns directly contesting bidding for and hosting the event. From 2013 to 2017, nine cities cancelled their bids in response to negative referenda or lack of political support, leaving very few candidates in most recent bid

processes, namely those for the 2022 and the 2024 Winter and Summer Olympic Games. These protests focus on the costs and negative impacts derived from the Olympics, as contemporary societies are more aware of sustainability paradigms and more concerned about public spending. Many of those impacts are directly related to issues of urban planning. Concerned about the future of the event, in 2014 the International Olympic Committee (IOC) developed and adopted Olympic Agenda 2020, under the motto "to change or to be changed, that is the question". This is a strategic guiding document for Olympic movement stakeholders consisting of 40 recommendations aimed at radically changing how the event is organised, reduce negative impacts and increase attractiveness for hosts. Its three pillars are



"sustainability", "credibility" and "youth". PyeongChang 2018, Tokyo 2020 and Beijing 2022 were already slightly affected by Olympic Agenda 2020 but the first two editions that will fully benefit from it are the Paris 2024 and the Milan-Cortina 2026 Summer and Winter Olympics.

bottom left: most frequent words in the speech by IOC President Thomas Bach when presenting Olympic Agenda 2020.
top right: NOlympics manifestation in Japan against Tokyo 2020.

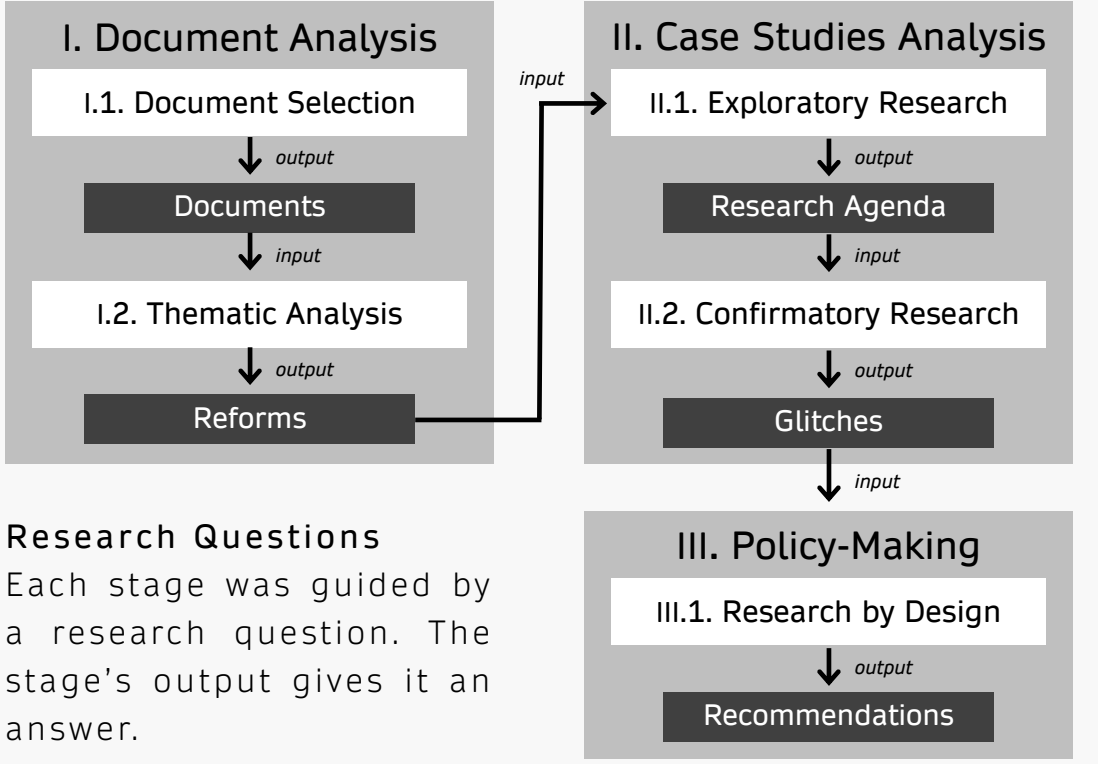


Urban Context Because of a set of specific characteristics, the Olympics can act as catalysts for urban regeneration projects. Many host cities, like Barcelona or London, have been able to take advantage of the event to transform their urban environments. Others, however, have been much less successful, like Athens or Rio de Janeiro, struggling to turn new infrastructures into useful resources for the population. Additionally, these constructions often incur high costs and cost overruns and trigger negative social and environmental impacts.



Objective Recognising that Olympic Agenda 2020 is ambitious, the objective was to frame the preparations for the next Games within its goals, identify problems in its implementation and develop recommendations that can further enhance its future benefits. The research is positioned in the point of view of the IOC.

Methodology The research was divided in three methodological parts, further divided in stages.



Research Questions Each stage was guided by a research question. The stage's output gives it an answer.

II.1. Exploratory Research *How are hosts not fulfilling the commitments?* The future Paris 2024 and Milan-Cortina 2026 Olympic Games were chosen as case studies to explore the alignment of their plans and preparations with the developed *Reforms*. The analysis was based on candidature files, with updates followed through online news. Cases of misalignment served to build a *Research Agenda* with questions to be clarified in the next methodological stage.

Research Agenda There were 35 formulated questions addressing situations of both case studies. Each question derives from the comparison between specific *Reforms* and specific issues of one or both case studies. For example, some of them relate to the need to build venues instead of using existing ones, to their costs and impacts, or to legacy concerns.



Q17 Is the construction of the Media Village compatible with city plans?

For Paris 2024, a Media Village is being built in an area next to Georges Valbon Park (Natura 2000). The site, Aires-des-Vents, is not protected by law but presented some vegetation and biodiversity and was earmarked in planning regulations for green areas and ecological corridors. These documents had to be modified; an action not compatible with reforms *Compliance* and *Legacy Planning*, which call for conformity with existing regulations and city plans.



Q27 Was there another option to avoid upgrading the Sliding Centre?

The renovation of the Milan-Cortina 2026 Sliding Centre raised concerns due to its costs and legacy viability. The population and the IOC suggested to move the events to the existing venue in Innsbruck, but organisers rejected it. Reforms *Resources* and *Constructions* call for maximizing the use of existing venues and ensuring the legacy of new ones. If not possible, reform *Locations* asks that events are moved to an existing venue, even if located outside the country.

III.1. Research by Design *What can be done in the future?* Based on logic, creativity and the knowledge acquired, *Recommendations* were developed to address the *Glitches*.

Recommendations Six *Recommendations* were built to enhance the Games' urban sustainability and improve the outcomes of Olympic Agenda 2020. Their headlines are:

1. Make the framework for the Olympic Programme context dependent.
2. Review the participants' experience criteria to make it more compatible with the host city's urban resources.
3. Improve planning to mitigate the risks that compromise the Games' urban sustainability.
4. Recognise the Olympic Games as a political instrument and formalise it accordingly.
5. Engage with the local communities.
6. Take advantage of the candidature process to implement the developed Recommendations.

Conclusion Olympic Agenda 2020 is driving great change. Paris 2024 and Milan-Cortina 2026 have shown how its effects can radically improve the urban sustainability of the Games, providing hosts with increasing flexibility to adapt to local contexts and optimise the use of existing resources. Still, there is a long journey to go to ensure that the Games are considered and perceived as sustainable. Interests of the Games' stakeholders, issues of

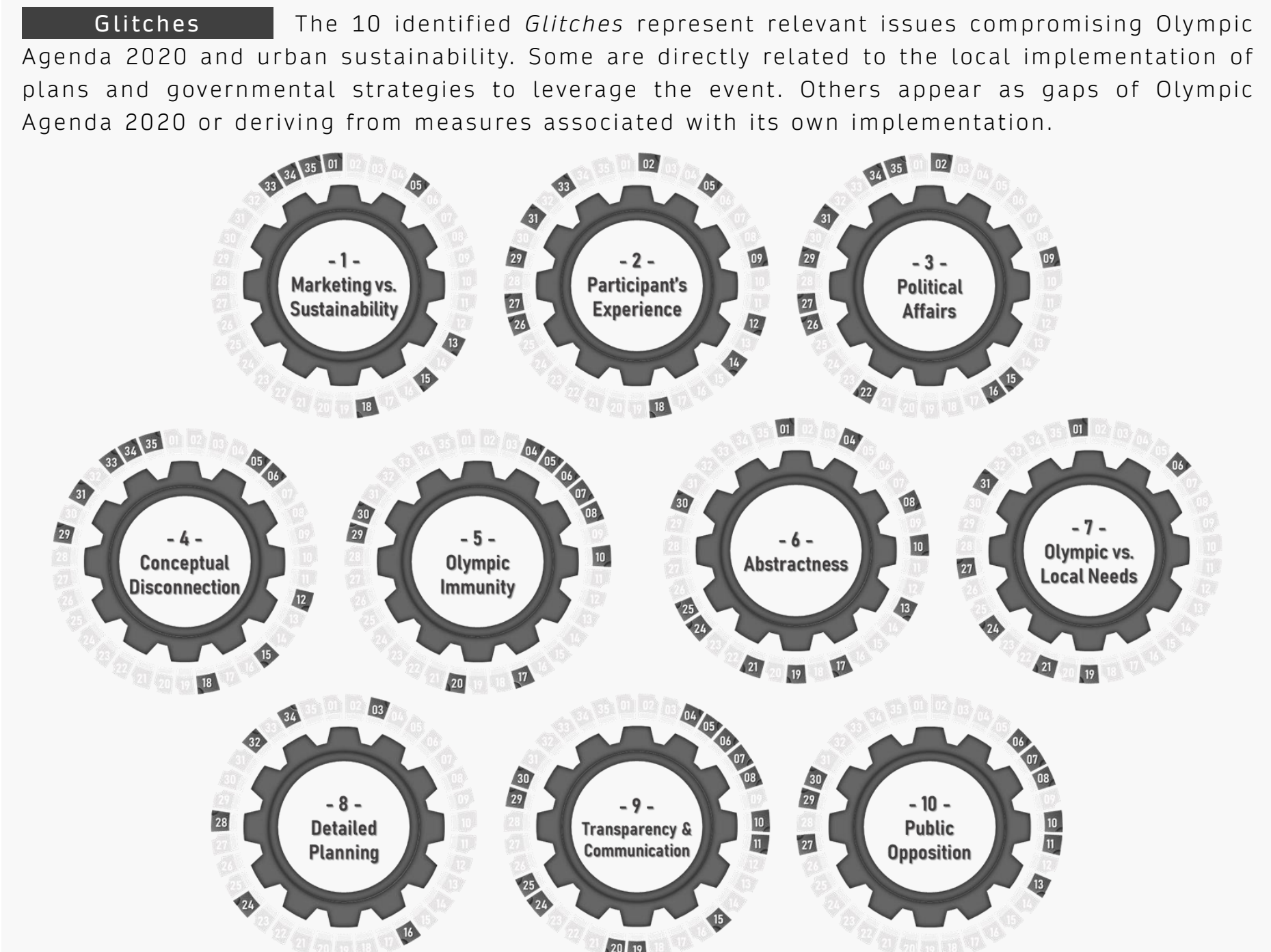
urban governance and local planning processes continue generating less desired outcomes. To carry on with this radical process of change and continue increasing the Games' sustainability, the IOC recently adopted Olympic Agenda 2020+5.



I.2. Thematic Analysis *How do such commitments relate to the territory?* The scope of Olympic Agenda 2020 is broad, addressing different subjects from a variety of fields of study, most of them not related to urban affairs. Thus, after selecting the relevant documents a thematic analysis was conducted to extract the contents of *IOC Policies* and *IOC Regulations* which refer to urban contexts. These were rearranged, grouped and contextualised to build 22 "urban-related" *Reforms*, combined in five "urban-related" *Objectives*.



II.2. Confirmatory Research *What was the reason for not fulfilling the commitments?* To carry out the *Research Agenda*, field visits were conducted to more than 100 Olympic-related sites of interest of both case studies. Interviews were also conducted to 26 individuals belonging to organising committees, local, municipal, and national governmental bodies, environmental associations, and civic groups. Collected data for the 35 questions was grouped to identify *Glitches*, which illustrate compromising issues that share similar decision-making roots, can lead to similar outcomes, or need similar mitigation measures.



-1- Marketing and sustainability need to be made more compatible -2- Some stakeholders' expectations need to be contained or reduced -3- Hosts' political ambitions cannot be disregarded as fundamental aspects of the Games -4- All stakeholders and levels of decision need to be integrated into the same conceptual framework -5- The integrity of the Olympics cannot be jeopardized by unnecessary constructions carried out under the special statutes of the Olympic law -6- Strict obligations cannot be certified by abstract terms like "legacy", "sustainability" and "viability" -7- Compatibility between Olympic and local needs has to be better ensured -8- Simplified candidature processes can compromise the feasibility of the proposals -9- Transparency of Olympic plans and communication towards local communities need to be improved -10- Public opposition needs to be directly tackled.