Sustainable Urban Development and Mega Events: The impacts of Olympic megacities in 2020 in future Olympic legacies

Objective
Recognising that Olympic Games 2020 is ambitious, the objective is to frame the preparations for the next Games within its goals, identify problems in its implementation and develop recommendations that can enhance and formalise 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:

I. Document Selection
II. Thematic Analysis
III. Confirmatory Research

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

I. 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 candidate 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.

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II. Thematic Analysis
How do such commitments relate to the territory?

The IOC’s Urban Sustainability Agenda 2020-2026 will transcend the multiple Olympic Games 2024 and 2026 as the future of the Olympic Games in some of the host cities and may represent the future of the Olympic movement

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III. 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 the commission or to the city’s environmental, social, and civic associations. Collected data for the 35 questions was grouped to identify glitches, which illustrate committing issues that share similar decision-making roots, can lead to similar outcomes, or need similar mitigation measures.

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Research Agenda
There were 35 recommendations addressing situations of both case studies. Each question derives from the urban sustainability of specific components and specific issues in one or both case studies. For example, some relate to the need to build venues instead of using existing ones, or costs and impacts, or to legacy concerns.

For Paris 2024, a Media Village is being built in an area next to Georges Vabson Park (Natura 2020). The site, Aire-des-Vents, is not protected by the Natura 2020 preservation of nature, biodiversity and was earmarked in planning regulations for residential and ecological corridors. These infrastructural and urban action not compatible with reforms Compliance and Legacy Planning call for reforms of existing regulations and city plans.

II. Literature Review
Is there another option to avoid upgrading the Sliding Centre?

In the renovation of the Milan-Cortina 2026 Sliding Centre raised concerns due to costs and legacy viability. The population and the IOC suggested to move the event to the existing venue in Innsbruck, but no plans were suggested for its replacement. Reforms Recommendations call for maximising the use of existing venues and weighing the legacy of new ones. If not possible, reform locations ask that event be linked to an existing venue even if located outside the country.

Olympic Games 2020 was driven by a desire for a 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 increased flexibility IOC to adapt to local contexts and emerging existing resources. Still, there are questions that need to be asked to ensure that the Games sustainability is perceived as sustainable. Interests of the Games’ stakeholders, issues of urban governance and Olympic planning processes continue generating less desired outcomes. To carry on with this radical process of change and continue increasing the Games’ sustainability, reforms will be adopted.

Research Agenda
The 10 identified glitches represent relevant issues compromising Olympic Games 2024 and 2026, and are related to the implementation of plans and governmental strategies to leverage the event. Others appear as gaps of Olympic Games 2020 or deriving from measures associated with its own implementation.

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Recommendations
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 candidate process to implement the developed Recommendations.