

The Olympic Games' Legacy

From an economic perspective, the Olympic Games' legacy must be measured both in terms of the effect it has on the national economy as well as on regional business. Projects undertaken

for the Olympic Games, will help boost the image of Athens, of the four other Olympic cities, and of the country in general, leaving behind a valuable inheritance in the form of infrastructure that will continue to benefit Greece, long after the Games' closing ceremony. The Olympic Games helped speed the completion of certain projects which otherwise may have been postponed indefinitely.

The Olympics-related roadworks, the major transportation projects, and the introduction of a Traffic Monitoring Centre will all contribute towards alleviating Athens' seriously congested roads, as will the creation of the tram, the suburban railway system, and the upgrade of the city's transportation network.

In terms of tourism, the industry stands to gain significant, long-term benefits from the building of new hotels, the upgrading of existing ones, the refurbishment of the city's main points of entry, such as the Port of Piraeus, and the creation of a conference centre.

It is interesting to see how facilities expressly built for the Games will be used after 2004. The media village in Amygdaleza is planned to serve as the police academy; the media village in Maroussi will house the administrative offices of the Ministry of Education, while the media villages at the Polytechnic Institute and at Athens University will be converted into modern dormitories. The Naval Officers' Academy and the Military Academy are being renovated to accommodate the Games' judges (the Military Academy will revert back to its original role after the Games). The Olympic Village's polyclinic will serve as a model health center for the Acharnes area, while an extensive urban redevelopment and a new transportation network are planned for Phaleron and a large, city park is in Helliniko's future.

Furthermore, there seem to be numerous investment opportunities emerging from the planned transfer of Olympic venues to the private sector. The company Olympic Properties S.A. was founded in order to manage Olympic venues and facilities after the Games. The company has already appraised the property, evaluated the investment opportunities, and examined the needs of the sports associations interested in the facilities. Once the Games have ended, Olympic Properties will announce tenders, inviting interested parties from the private sector to bid for the management of the facilities.

In the meantime, an OECD report on Athens and the 2004 Olympic Games, asserted that the infrastructure and facilities the country has gained as a result of the Games, can be exploited through a new management strategy, for both zoning and venue management in order to ensure long-term, positive results for everyone involved: residents, local authorities, and private investors. Additionally, the OECD report emphasises that future development should be based on a physical planning framework, and a set of parameters—clearly defined by the

government—so as to avoid past mistakes.

The Paralympic Games also required new infrastructure, which must also be considered as part of the Games' legacy. The state, small- and medium-sized enterprises, the hotel industry, sports infrastructure, and the surrounding areas all benefited from these projects. Additionally, Greeks became more aware and more sensitive to individuals with a disability, while emphasis was placed on the ability and equal rights of the physically-challenged. The fact that certain Greek companies, especially those in the tourism industry, failed to see the market potential of this population, greatly limited potential benefits.

Perhaps, the most valuable aspect of the Games' legacy to the Greek business community, is the international recognition and credibility that Greece acquires on all levels: production, commerce and distribution of products and services. This recognition represents the country's most valuable asset, "an invisible source of wealth, that will enrich both the country's private enterprise and public sector."

Lost Opportunities

While Athens gained extensive and major infrastructure on account of the Olympic Games that might otherwise have been delayed or postponed indefinitely, nonetheless the city could have achieved better results in certain areas. The environment, for example, was not one of the Games' beneficiaries. Although, the necessary capital, time, and know-how were available, the initial intentions of protecting and upgrading the environment were never realized.

Early on, the environmental group Greenpeace (to a great extent responsible for Sydney's "Green" Games) had pointed out that:

"Athens' success in adopting and implementing new technologies (in the fields of energy, construction, waste and water management, etc.) is quite insignificant; interventions, which aside from the immediate, positive effects they would have had on the environment, would have also created new markets, opened new potential avenues of economic growth, reinforced "green" entrepreneurship, and would have served as an example. In most cases, inertia prevailed, while specifications were made according to standard contractual practice, thus eliminating any chance for innovation. Furthermore, possible cooperation was sabotaged, since the submission of proposals and environmentally-friendly guidelines were considered an awkward intervention on the part of bureaucratic organisations, which defended their turf and what they considered to be their rights and privileges. Thus, using tight deadlines as an excuse, terrible compromises were made, leading to decisions and practices that have nothing to do with the vision for a Green Olympics. Athens lost the opportunity to hold real, Green Olympic

Games; the city lost the bet it made with itself when it bid for the Olympics, promoting an environmentally-friendly dimension of the Games. Finally, it missed the opportunity to build on the experience of the Sydney Games, since Athens failed to adopt all the positive practices applied there. Instead, the city chose to stick with the conventional and the obvious, missing the chance for innovation.” (translation)

The construction of the Olympic Village, the largest residential development project to be undertaken in Greece to date, provides testimony to the above statement. The construction of the apartments failed to comply with various laws and guidelines, such as: YPEHODE’s “Energy 2001” action plan, the Directive for Rational Use and Conservation of Energy, and the new EU directive which recommends the use of environmentally-friendly paints and materials in the construction of buildings, as well as the use of solar and other forms of energy that are not harmful to the environment. The apartment buildings consume large amounts of energy, air conditioning units were used despite denials to the contrary, and no water conservation system was installed.

By contrast, for the Sydney Games, only alternative energy sources were utilized; 50% of the total number of photovoltaic systems operating in Australia are found in the Olympic Village. Additionally, Sydney also implemented a modern water management system, succeeding in recycling 50% of used water and 10% of potable water; 100% of rainwater was collected, and water consumption decreased 30% despite increased demand.

In Athens, infrastructure works left behind large quantities of cement; plant life was left unprotected while works were in progress, and no efforts for additional landscaping were made. However, a few months before the Games, when it became obvious that all of Athens, including the Olympic Village, was a monotonous shade of gray, there was a rush to add some green to the city, by importing various trees and plants (mainly from Spain), since Greek greenhouses had not received orders early enough to be able to fill them. As a result, aside from the greater cost involved in importing plants, there was also the risk that the imported plants would not survive until the Games, and a greater risk that they wouldn’t survive afterwards.

Construction of Olympic projects resulted in the production of 2 million tons of building materials, annually, which were disposed of haphazardly, causing environmental damage—despite the fact that the means for recycling these materials were available.

Since a comprehensive system for the management of building materials waste was non-existent, the materials could not be re-used, thus losing out on the chance for reduced costs and greater environmental benefits (energy reduction in concrete production, waste reduction,

etc.). Sydney, on the other hand managed to reuse 300,000 tons of recycled concrete.

The most important opportunity missed in connection to the 2004 Athens Games was the chance to motivate the country's citizens to become involved in the Games and especially to participate in the developments affecting their city. This does not refer to the number of people who volunteered—there were enough volunteers to cover the needs of the Games—but to the number of citizens who took part in Athens' urban redevelopment, the way Barcelona residents did. The difference between the two cities is that Barcelona's organisers and the city's local authorities rallied citizens' support going door-to-door. In Athens, residents remained, for the most part, cool observers, simply tolerating the side effects the Olympic projects produced in their daily routine. To a great extent, local authorities, professional associations, and citizens' groups are responsible for keeping a distance from Olympic preparations.