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Bidding and Urban Development

Abstract This chapter reviews recent urban studies and urban affairs scholarship on three major event-led development models: mega-events as a temporary catalyst for long-term development, as embedded within an urban regime governance strategy, and as a policy experiment. The critical question explored in this chapter is: why do certain cities continue to find it worthwhile to bid in an increasingly tumultuous urban political environment? We argue that the resilience of bidding politics hinges on the degree to which bids are integrated into longer term local development politics: the cities that are most likely to continue bidding are those which are less concerned with actually hosting the Games, but, instead with to use bidding as part of a more holistic development strategy.

Keywords Bid strategy · Catalyst · Event-led development · Urban governance

This chapter assesses the urban politics of bidding, highlighting the rationales that bidders use to promote their projects. An Olympic bid is a unique document because it must harness the favor of the IOC's

selection committee while simultaneously catering to a series of local planning concerns. A successful bid “depends on both technical competency and local symbolic difference” (Tolzmann 2014, p. 602). Tolzmann (2014) argues that candidate cities who are unable to develop a compelling “local” message on how they can “bring something new and different to the global Olympic vision” (p. 602) will struggle to gain IOC members’ votes. Bid committees not only have to defend why pursuing the Olympic Games is a reasonable proposition but also explain what expected legacies might develop. As noted in the previous chapter, part of the appeal of sports mega-events is that they allow legacy intentions to be recalibrated to accommodate diverse purposes (Tomlinson 2014).

The increased leveraging of sport mega-events has expanded the implications of the bidding process not only for the bidding city but also for the stature of the Olympic Movement and other cities considering or engaged in entrepreneurial urbanism. For many cities bidding for the Olympic Games represents a key episode in their urban development, stimulating negotiation between large institutional interests and the local citizenry that might not otherwise occur. The results of this negotiation are mixed. At times, competing claims fail to produce an accommodating vision with staying power. It is also possible to view the bidding process as a task-specific rescaling strategy that has the potential to reorient economic and social policy to the private sector’s “needs” (Hall 2006; Jessop 2002). It is equally plausible to view the Olympic bidding process as a critical component of a “neo-liberal shock doctrine” (Gaffney 2015) that results in jurisdictional rescaling, in a manner that abandons “traditional democratic channels of accountability” (Swyngedouw et al. 2002, pp. 560–561). At the same time, many bid cities use the opportunity to develop an “institutionalized multi-scalar collaboration” that allows the city to break through development inertia (Horak 2013).

Unfortunately, the legacies of failed Olympic bids have received relatively limited empirical attention, with most of the scholarly attention focused on Olympic “winners.”¹ Building on Oliver’s (2011) claim that “studying the pursuit of mega-events (the Olympics) helps inform our understanding of political institutions as well as the creation and representation of public interest” (p. 783), as well as Lauermann’s (2014) argument that planning for the Olympics can be thought of “both

as a tool for local development and as a market for their own locally produced knowledge and policy commodities” (p. 2639), this chapter explores a number of bid strategies at play in a broad sample of cities.

In the discussion that follows, we illustrate three “framing narratives” used by Olympic bidders to describe event-led development should the bid be successful (and even if the city does not actually secure a hosting contract). These narratives are used to challenge the perceived ephemerality of the Olympic Games and failed bids, giving bidders a rationale for their project even though the project is risky. We rely both on secondary evidence and on a comparative analysis of a large number of bid books. The three narratives include deploying an Olympic bid as (1) a catalyst for long-term development, (2) embedded within a governance strategy, and (3) a form of policy experiment. We recognize that these narratives are not mutually exclusive and bidders may cite multiple rationales (e.g., when there are multiple bids over time) when pursuing a mega-event. We agree with Tomlinson (2014) who notes, “there is no routine formula for the modelling and implementation of legacy” (p. 139). One benefit of exploring these narratives is that it makes clear that “bidding not winning” (Horne and Whannel 2012, p. 9) has become a desirable result for many cities. Ironically, many cities have decided that the Creed of the Olympics: “The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part ...” can be extended to the bidding process with many cities finding it worthwhile to bid because it is a means to non-Olympic urban development ends. Let us turn to an examination of three key framing narratives that have emerged from the bidding process over the last few decades.

Three Framing Narratives

Temporary “Catalyst”

When bidders reference the catalyst potential of their projects, they describe a temporary project which can be used to initiate long-term development by mobilizing actors, lining up financing, and securing regulatory clearances. This narrative is often associated with

entrepreneurial, neoliberal forms of urban governance which rely on municipal real estate speculation as a means to generate growth (Hall 2006; Harvey 1990). As noted in Chap. 1, the emergence of large-scale alterations to the built environment triggered by Olympic investment has been linked to the 1960 Olympics in Rome (Essex and Chalkley 2004; Liao and Pitts 2006; Shoval 2002) and further supported by the shift to post-Fordist, post-industrial, neoliberal, entrepreneurial, and global economics. Today, bidders promoting the catalytic potential of the Olympics often cite the “Barcelona model” of Olympic-led regeneration. In Barcelona, the Olympics were used to restructure, regenerate, and rebrand an industrial corridor along the Mediterranean coast and ushered in a new era of planning in the city. The result was a rebalancing of the city’s wealth distribution and a refined city image designating Barcelona as a commercial and tourist destination that matched the considerable physical transformation (Degen and García 2012; Smith 2012, Chap. 5). For subsequent Olympic planners, this label has typically referred to the use of a mega-event to catalyze urban development by redirecting investment to particular neighborhoods or spatial planning agendas (Kassens-Noor 2013; Liao and Pitts 2006).

Most bids contain some language which asserts that winning the right to host will boost, accelerate, or catalyze urban development. Since the IOC now emphasizes that bid cities must illustrate how the bid (and potentially playing host) fits into a city’s long-term planning strategy, bid cities now regularly provide a statement indicating that the short-term deadlines of the Olympics will accelerate urban regeneration and stimulate regional economic development or as Rio de Janeiro’s 2016 bid put it: “hasten the transformation” (Rio 2016 2009 , p. 19).

The difference between cities concentrating on the catalytic potential of the Games versus other motivations is often a matter of emphasis. Those cities pursuing the catalyst strategy tend to focus more on how the event can be leveraged to kick-start urban transformation and less on the broader portfolio of development agendas. For example, Annecy 2018 (2010) proposed that its bid would be “a catalyst for the region’s sustainable development” (p. 5) that could “accelerate its move towards sustainable, year-round tourism... to lay new foundations for the relationship

between Man and mountain” (Annecy 2018 [2010](#), p. 17). Annecy 2018 ([2010](#)) further declared: “Hosting the Games will enable Annecy to speed up improvements and upgrades to its transport infrastructure, in particular, rail, through the partial doubling of the track between Annecy and Chamonix and the modernisation of the Chambéry /Aix-les-Bains / Annecy link” (p. 21). Beyond greater accessibility to the region, the bid proposed that “[t]he Games will act as a catalyst for the development of traditional local industries, offering new job opportunities, and giving people from disadvantaged backgrounds access to employment” (Annecy 2018 [2010](#), p. 21). Annecy 2018 ([2010](#)) also expanded the catalyst narrative by claiming that hosting would be an important “catalyst for raising awareness” (p. 19) about how Alpine resorts could be developed and managed in a more socially and sustainable manner. The bid itself was said to “bring momentum to the process of rolling out the eco-resort model across numerous winter sports resorts” (Annecy 2018 [2010](#), p. 19).

The series of bids made by Rio de Janeiro are also frequently used to illustrate how an urban master plan can be adjusted to reflect the infrastructure needs of the Olympics and how desires to become a mega-event city can prompt a series of urban interventions (Boykoff and Mascarenhas [2016](#); Gaffney [2015](#); Leopkey and Parent [2012](#)). For Gaffney ([2010](#)), there can be no doubt that “developmental acceleration” was the key message of Rio’s 2016 bid even if the specifics of the urban plans were lost in “cryptic phrases” (p. 23). Rio de Janeiro’s Mayor Eduardo Paes repeatedly declared that the city bid for the Games as a means to implement some important infrastructure projects including regeneration of the city’s port area, as well a number of environmental remediation (e.g., cleaning of Guanabara Bay) and transportations projects (e.g., the Transoeste Bus Rapid Transit express corridor).

The spatial improvement of infrastructure was equally prominent in Athens 2004 bid (Yawei [2015](#), p. 78). The *Official Report of the XXVIII Olympiad: Athens 2004* makes it clear that “[t]he Athens Bid File for the 2004 Olympic Games was an operational plan for an organized intervention in the urban complex of the contemporary capital of the Greek State and its general environs” (ATHOC 2004 [2005](#), p. 74). The Official Report further adds:

It was obvious that the Athens Bid File for the 2004 Olympic Games formed an integrated operating plan that incorporated the Major Projects that were already underway from the mid-nineteen nineties. Simultaneously, Athens created the prerequisites for rapid implementation of large-scale interventions, such as the 'reclamation of the Coastal Front of the City' along the coast of the Saronic Gulf. (ATHOC 2004 [2005](#), p. 74)

The opportunity to tackle "Major Projects" was first introduced during Athens' failed 1996 bid, which had exposed the city's struggle to implement comprehensive urban planning in the post-World War II period. The 1996 bid is said to have "contributed to the final formulation of the framework to implement the so-called Major Works," a list that included reclaiming the city's seafont, expansion of the metro system, construction of major road axes, renovation of the city's historic center, and other "major salvation works" (ATHOC 2004 [2005](#), p. 64).

The post-event legacy goals of the catalyst approach reside in the planned changes to the built or physical environment. Bidding is viewed as means to expedite those goals when event planning is "used as a trigger for a wide range of urban improvements" (Essex and Chalkley [1998](#), pp. 200–201). Winning the bid is the best case scenario for catalyst proponents; while failed bids certainly can act as catalysts (Alberts [2009](#); Benneworth and Dauncey [2010](#)), a successful bid would presumably yield a larger catalytic impact. In their audit of the urban impacts of the Olympics, Essex and Chalkley ([1998](#)) claim that while it may be safer to say that the Olympics "accelerate change rather than initiate it" they maintain that "the scale of the modern Olympics and the sums of money they now generate are such that it is difficult to envisage many of the related urban developments taking place without Olympic resources and the political pressures deriving from a clear deadline and intense interest from the international media" (p. 203). For instance, Rio's [2016](#) bid book projected that more than USD\$ 13 billion would be dedicated to the land investment budget and Müller ([2014](#)) has calculated that the capital costs for Sochi 2014 comprised 90% of the total budget and represented nearly a USD\$ 40 billion investment in non-sports-related costs. In contrast, Paris 2012 downplayed the catalytic potential of hosting. Citing the goals of the Olympic Games Study Commission Report

to the 115th IOC Session, Paris 2012 submitted that it was “committed to controlling costs, mastering the complexities of the Games, making optimal use of existing infrastructure, and taking full account of environmental concerns and the need for sustainable development” (Paris 2012 2004, p. 15). Paris 2012 proposed a modest land investment budget, claiming that only USD\$ 2.34 billion of additional infrastructure would be required and the bid repeatedly drew attention to the fact that the city was *already* well equipped with both sport and supporting infrastructure. As we discuss in Chap. 7, the vulnerabilities of the catalyst model have been increasingly exploited by anti-Olympic urban social movements which intentionally mobilize early in the planning process to challenge the normative legitimacy of the bid itself. For example, the messy demise of Boston’s 2024 bid was linked to a lack of public confidence in a catalyst narrative. Although bid organizers repeatedly emphasized the catalyst impact the Games would have on the city’s urban regeneration projects, anti-bid social movements widely publicized the limitations of econometric models which posit a catalyst effect, going so far as to partner with prominent academic economists to critique the catalyst narrative (Lauermann 2016a; Zimbalist 2015, pp. ix-xii).

Governance Strategy

Bids are also used as part of urban political strategy, by which a temporary project highlights or legitimates the decisions being made by urban leaders. While the language of catalyst is often used in these bids to justify investment spending, the political logic is distinct from the catalyst model: the bid is used to develop institutional capacity regardless of whether it actually provides a catalyst effect in the built environment. Here, we find that mega-events can “open up interstitial spaces that allow place entrepreneurs within a community to leverage or change existing institutional arrangements” (Glynn 2008, p. 1118). Smith (2012) has argued that the focus on legacy has begun to consider the importance of social regeneration and the previous “obsession with physical change, image enhancement and economic development has been supplemented with more attention to ‘softer’ outcomes” (p. 60).

This form of “mega-event strategy” (Andranovich et al. 2001, p. 113) is often linked to a rescaling of urban regime politics as bidding provides local projects with a global sense of importance so that “the urban regime incorporates “locally grounded” elites as well as transnational actors” (Surborg et al. 2008, p. 353). At other times, this type of planning is associated with investment by developmental states into their cities. Such “state dirigisme in megaprojects” (Müller 2011) operates on “a different kind of calculus of costs and benefits...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” (Black and Peacock 2011, pp. 2271–2272). Thinking about bids as governance strategy shifts the focus from considering not just *what* the bid is proposing, but involves thinking about *who* (both individuals and institutions) is doing the bidding and how the bid can leverage “both existing institutional mechanisms, and create new ones, implicating the possibilities for both configuring the field anew and for reconfiguring the existing field” (Glynn 2008, p. 1118). A failed bid can be “a triggering event” or agent of change that “shapes the configuration (and reconfiguration) of a field of actors within a geographic community” (Glynn 2008, p. 1119). These strategies move between local debates over urban policy and sweeping claims about the global significance of the bid project, as local leaders justify their agendas with “the production of solutions, explanations, and models that are universalizable” (Lauermann and Davidson 2013, p. 1278).

One of the better examples of “governance strategy” is provided by Benneworth and Dauncey (2010) who assess the capacity-building benefits of Lyon’s failed bid for the 1968 Summer Games. They argue that the 1968 Olympic bid sought to reinvent Lyon “as a metropolitan anchor outside Paris” (Benneworth and Dauncey 2010, p. 1097) and claim that “[t]he bidding process compelled national elites to look more closely at Lyon and understand what it as a city contributed to French development” (2010, p. 1097). Here we find that the catalytic role of the bid had less to do with short-term material infrastructural changes, and is more concerned with generating “symbolic emotional narratives” that could influence development trajectories in the longer term (Benneworth and Dauncey 2010, p. 1097). For Benneworth and Dauncey (2010), it is reasonable to conclude that “[t]he Olympic bid

became part of a process—and indeed catalysed a change—in the way the Lyon's and Paris' key decision makers regarded Lyon" (p. 1096). Capacity building was generated because "[t]he bid allowed various actors to find a value in cooperation" and recognize the collective benefits of collaboration (Benneworth and Dauncey 2010, p. 1094).

Elsewhere, Alberts (2009, p. 507) has illustrated that while Berlin's 2000 bid sought to use the Games as a "motor for urban development", the bid emerged during a period when the city was being radically transformed. The dismantling of the Berlin Wall had exposed the diversity of planning and development goals between the two halves of the city, and the Olympics represented not only an "opportunity to carry out or speed up urban development projects that might not otherwise be realized" but also held the potential to "integrate the two halves of the city" (Alberts 2009, p. 509). A successful Berlin bid had the capacity to "heal the physical scars the Berlin Wall had left on the city and help East Berlin to catch up with West Berlin, both economically and in terms of quality of life for its residents" (Alberts 2009, p. 513). Here we find that goals of German unification coexisted with the desires of a modernized Berlin. But the bid also served to solidify Berlin's embracement of a "service center strategy" that sought to "capture global investment by marketing the city as a cosmopolitan and business-friendly city" (Strom and Mayer 1998, p. 123). Promoted as a means to escape from the shadow of the 1936 Berlin Olympics organized by the Nazi Regime, Berlin's 2000 bid emphasized Berlin's "cosmopolitanism, cultural diversity and tolerance" (Colomb 2012, p. 94) and provided the occasion for local policymakers to orient and brand a "new" Berlin as a destination for global commerce (Colomb 2012; Strom 2001). Although various models of urban development were "bitterly discussed" both during and after Berlin's bid, city and House of Representative leaders supported the efforts of public-private partnerships focused on place branding and tourist promotion (Colomb 2012, p. 106). The bid set in motion a more permanent commitment to the "search for global competitiveness at all costs" (Colomb 2012, p. 106), with the pursuit of iconic projects—witness the redevelopment of Potsdamer Platz and the construction of the Science and Technology Park at Adlershof later in the decade—firmly reflecting this new governance strategy.

A similar logic emerges from Manchester's unsuccessful bids for the 1992 1996, and 2000 Olympic Games, with the city's *modus operandi* reflecting the new partnerships, relational politics, and policy mobilities developed during the bid process (Cook and Ward 2011; this volume, Chap. 6). Likewise, Cape Town's 2004 bid goal of restructuring the apartheid city illustrates a shifting governance logic that can be incorporated during a bid effort (Hiller 2000). Hiller (2000) claims that Cape Town's bid was significant because it "explicitly linked the mega-event to the human development needs of a third-world city" (p. 441). In more detail, Hiller argues that the catalytic effect of an Olympics would have been to "improve the life conditions of the historically disadvantaged" while simultaneously performing "a role in the redesign of the apartheid city whereby old barriers would be eliminated and new linkages created" (Hiller 2000, p. 441). But unlike the Berlin case example, Hiller (2000) is keen to illustrate that Cape Town's bid contained "a thinly veiled critique of all that Olympism had become and appealed to global justice as the rationale for awarding the bid to Africa" (p. 442). In doing so, Hiller (2000) argues: "the Cape Town bid provided an entirely new variation of the rationale for utilizing a mega-event for urban development" (p. 442).

There have been other efforts to utilize an Olympic bid as a means to facilitate reconciliation or reunification. For instance, PyeongChang's 2010 Winter Olympic bid proposed a joint South/North Korea Olympics, but its successful 2018 Winter Olympic bid offered a much weaker diplomatic commitment in the form of "*aid* to North Korea" (Merkel and Kim 2011, p. 2376). For Merkel and Kim (2011), PyeongChang's 2018 effort was a government-led bid that was driven by "ideological and economic motives rather than practical and humanitarian objectives" (p. 2378). Likewise, Istanbul 2020 acknowledged that hosting would "advance critical transport and economic development infrastructure" (Istanbul 2020 2013, p. 23) but its candidature file stressed how Turkey's image and reputation would be repositioned:

Istanbul 2020 offers an opportunity for the first ever secular Muslim democracy to host the Games and the first ever city to stage the event on two continents simultaneously. Staging the Games in Turkey will deliver a

timely and powerful catalyst to improve global understanding, inclusiveness and harmony. İstanbul, with a rich mosaic of diversity, layered history and acceptance woven into its very core, is ideally placed to play this role. (Istanbul 2020 2013, p. 20)

Bid failure might be considered less problematic for a bid city pursuing the “governance strategy” model, as “even submitting a bid package...is enough to warrant media exposure and warrant some claim to Olympic symbols to unify disparate stakeholders” (Andranovich et al. 2001, p. 127). Smith (2012) refers to Manchester’s 1996 and 2000 Olympic bids as “phantom events” that city leveraged to promote urban development. For Smith, the “associative” power that can be generated by bidding calls into question the role of failure in mega-event politics, engaging with unsuccessful bids in strategic ways. Similarly, Oliver (2014; 2011) has illustrated that after five failed attempts (1960, 1964, 1976, 1996, 2008) to secure the Olympic Games, these losing bids have played a key role in the reimagining and regulation of the city’s waterfront land. Toronto’s failed 2008 bid is credited with providing the impetus for a Waterfront Task Force that eventually shifted to a public corporation (i.e., Waterfront Toronto) supported by a tripartite agreement between the City of Toronto, the Province of Ontario, and the Federal government as well as \$1.5 billion funding allocation to help guide waterfront renewal (see Chap. 6 for a more thorough discussion of Toronto’s bid efforts). The legacy goals in this model are more intangible and relate to institutional change, economic impacts, or social outcomes. Several authors have illustrated how mega-events might be thought of as vehicles to exercise “soft power” (Nye 1990), using diplomatic overtures to seek geopolitical influence (Grix and Houlihan 2014; Scharfenort 2012; Koch 2014) or as part of broader strategies aimed at place branding (Gold and Gold 2008; Zhang and Zhao 2009).

Policy Experiments

Bids can also be conceptualized as policy experiments, in which a temporary project is used to test out a policy agenda at a manageable scale.

The purpose of these experiments is to usher in and test out new planning regimes, through pilot projects or small-scale test programs. This framing narrative is distinct in that the bidding process is viewed as an experiment (or, perhaps, a series of experiments). The legacy goals for this model are designed to be scalable beyond the city (Shin 2014; Lauermann 2016a). These experiments include agendas as diverse as ecological modernization (Mol 2010; Koch 2014), pro-poor development (Pillay and Bass 2008), industrial upgrading (Scharfenort 2012), or social unity (Shin 2012).

In these bids, failure or success are even less relevant. The purpose of bidding is to demonstrate state capacity or to test policy on a local scale, neither of which is dependent on a hosting contract. In several cities, bid officials half-jokingly claim that second place in the bid competition might be the best result because the bid process offers an opportunity to draft and mobilize different policy objectives and garner significant media exposure without the burden of having to meet hosting deadlines (Masterman, 2008). Indeed, winning a bid is not necessarily the most desirable outcome because global attention is generated for urban regime agendas through bidding; a bid failure might even insulate leaders from criticism because it allows flexibility to continue projects without the strictures of externally mandated Olympic design specifications. Of course, leveraging the Olympics by proposing “utilitarian”² bids poses problems for the Olympic movement (MacAloon 2016; Torres 2012).

The opening pages of Baku’s 2016 applicant file stressed that “[t]hrough its engagement with the subject of the 2016 Baku bid, the City of Baku and the Republic of Azerbaijan as a whole is gaining invaluable experience ...” (Baku 2016 2007, p. 6). Later in the application file, there is the candid acknowledgment that “[t]he Republic of Azerbaijan is well aware that its current sports infrastructure is lagging behind international standards” and that City of Baku needed to diversify its economic base beyond oil extraction (Baku 2016 2007, p. 10). The desire to diversify through infrastructure investment was a theme carried to Baku’s 2020 applicant file. Broadly speaking, Baku’s 2016 and 2020 bids convey a sense that the Olympic project was an experiment in imagining other forms of development. For example, Azad Rahimov

(quoted in Moore 2008), Azerbaijan's Youth and Sports Minister noted that, "submitting a bid now builds a foundation for a time when Azerbaijan is better known and better positioned to bid again. These preparations will give us a lot of experience and we want that. And for a small country like ours it also means fantastic publicity." The sentiment is repeated in the 2020 applicant file, which argues that bid experiments will unleash "the potential to be not only a role model of sustainability within the region, but also to become a leading global city and world class destination, achieved through a visionary masterplan for sustainable development" (Baku 2020 2013, p. 3).

Doha's mega-event bidders have used a similar experimental narrative, linking a narrative about post-oil development planning to their bids for the 2016 and 2020 Games (as well as related mega-event projects like the 2006 Asian Games and the 2022 World Cup). For example, the 2020 applicant file argues that "Doha will become a regional model for informed modernisation and new development" through investments in sustainability technology and a knowledge economy" (2013, p. 3) and plans for both the 2020 Olympic and the 2022 World Cup link to clean energy initiatives like solar-powered stadiums. Broadly, these experiments reflect the ambitions of the Qatari developmental state (Scharfenort 2012; Koch 2014), and the bids directly reference national master plans like the *Qatar 2030 National Vision*. More specifically, the national state allocates funding through enclave development projects, "self-contained 'cities within the city'" (Salama and Wiedmann 2013, p. 84) that are linked to specific developmental agendas like building a western educational model (i.e., the "Education City" neighborhood) or incubating alternative energy startups (i.e., the "Energy City" research park). Bidders are careful to explain their real estate and event planning initiatives in the language of these developmental state experiments, as a way to secure political support and lobby for national funding (Lauermann 2016b).

These experimental narratives are often linked to a rescaling of urban policy: using the bid as a way to develop local policy that has transnational political significance. For example, a number of recent bids have adopted the experiment narrative when discussing their contributions to global knowledge networks, seeking to cast their cities as a sort of

laboratory for urban policymaking. The assumption underlying these bids is that exporting replicable policy tools (design practices, policy templates, etc.) make the bid more competitive in hosting competitions, as local policy initiatives are promoted as best practices for mega-event planning in general. The experiment model is seen in extensive “policy tourism” by local leaders across Olympic bidding cities (Cook and Ward 2011; González 2011), and in various bidders’ claims that they will provide “a new model for urban sport development” (Chicago 2016 2009, p. 20), a “primary role model of best practice for the Olympic Movement moving forward” (Madrid 2016 2009, p. 17) or “brand-enhancing initiatives to be developed with the IOC...all of which could also be adopted by other future hosts” (Annecy 2018 2010, p. 22). For instance, after the London 2012 Olympic planners published a proposed global standard for environmental management at mega-events, a number of other bidding cities published their own environmental management policy templates as alternatives to the London template (Lauermann 2014, pp. 2647–2649).

Bids made on behalf of Madrid are particularly direct in this type of experimental narrative. Across nearly a decade of continuous bidding, Olympic candidature files evolve from a loose sustainability strategy that applied general principles from the United Nations and IOC to local environmental initiatives (Madrid 2012 2005, p. 27), to promises to deliver “a new urban model that is clean, efficient, and sustainable” (Madrid 2016 2009, p. 17), to a preliminary management model branded with the acronym “SMART” (Madrid 2020 2013a, b). Along the way, the bid planners were slowly building out an Olympic master plan, such that by the time the bidders made their final 2020 bid presentation to the IOC, the bid presentation team was able to boast that 80% of the original master plan had been constructed over the course of the bids and thus “Madrid 2020 is not a dream. We have already built it” (quoted in a Madrid 2020 press release, 3 July 2013a, b).

While experimental bidding is particularly innovative, experimentation can lead to “disassociated governance” (Keil 1998) when urban development and local democracy become uncoupled (Bellás and Oliver 2016; Raco 2013). By articulating bid proposals as experiments—which are by definition contingent and preliminary—there is a danger

that citizens will overlook the long-term ramifications of bid planning. While investments may be proposed as merely experimental, subsequent movement on projects can reshape urban policy with little or no public debate (see also our analysis of “politics of contingency” in Chap. 7). In the abovementioned Madrid example, for instance, a surprisingly large amount of investment was pushed through over the course of multiple failed bid experiments. Indeed, the city’s mayor was able to claim in the same final presentation to the IOC that “We have adapted the city to the Games, not the Games to the city” (Madrid 2020 press release, 3 July 2013a, b).

Conclusion

It is important to analyze the political narratives used to promote bids. While mega-event planning projects are “temporary” urban policy initiatives, they rarely occur as individual events. Rather, these temporary projects are linked to longer term development agendas through political framing narratives: that the bid can act as a catalyst for development or reform, that it can facilitate part of a political strategy, or that it can act as an experiment for testing governance ideas.

The political logic of a catalyst bid is located within a “framework of post-Fordism, globalization, and the role of spectacle in post-modern societies” (Essex and Chalkley 1998, p. 188) and emphasize return on investment or the ability of a lean financing model to generate spillover effects. Bids focused heavily on the catalytic potential are increasingly facing resistance, because they typically struggle to provide politically persuasive links between the bid and broader development agendas. In contrast, bids which seek to facilitate a broader portfolio of governance agendas are likely to be more resilient, in part because they can capitalize on the relatively low marginal cost of multiple bids (plans are already ongoing for other strategies or experiments).

An important factor is the role of the state in the bid. While mega-event planning generally requires significant state intervention, some bidders are more willing to acknowledge and take advantage of that intervention or are powerless to prevent such an intrusion (see our

discussion in Chap. 6). There is a clear need to map the broader networks of mega-event projects given that they frequently reveal the trans-local nature of urban political coalitions, and their evolving event-led development priorities.

Notes

1. We follow the IOC's categorization of bid cities as those cities which submit a preliminary applicant file (and/or in the process of doing so, between their nomination by an NOC and the first submission). This means we include those cities that may have withdrawn their application, but does not include every city that expresses an interest in hosting to the IOC.
2. The goal of utilitarian bids according to Torres (2012) is "not to obtain the right to host the Olympic Games but rather to use the bidding process as a means to achieve other goals" (p. 10).

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