

THE INTANGIBLE HERITAGE OF OLYMPIC STADIUMS

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ABSTRACT

Related historically to culture, the Olympic Games (OG) always played an important role in stadium architecture, especially in its evolution in the Modern era. Most of the Olympic stadiums have been conceptual and technological catalysts in the construction of outstanding sports facilities. The value analysis of listed modern Olympic stadiums of the 20th century can become a tool to describe the significance of a specific Olympic stadium. Significance is related not only to the uniqueness or singularity of the buildings, sites and landscapes, but also to its relationship with noteworthy socio-cultural events. Olympic stadiums appear as testimonies of the evolution of sport and its status in our societies. Thus, they also bequeath us a specific intangible heritage. The interplay between tangible and intangible values always deserves a detailed study in the conservation plan of each Olympic or other emblematic stadium.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, the Olympic Games are related to culture. UNESCO declared the site of Olympia as World Cultural Heritage (WCH) in 1989 (UNESCO, 1989). ‘The Stadium at Olympia is directly and tangibly associated with an event of universal significance’ (ICOMOS 1988). Modern Olympic Games still play an important role in the evolution of the stadium buildings, sites, landscapes, and their uses. Currently, there are 25 Olympic stadiums in the world. Twenty modern stadiums have hosted the Olympic Games in the 20th century, a century of particular interest because it was marked by a major expansion in sport and sporting events. Seven of the 20th-century modern Olympic stadiums are now listed as cultural heritage. In some cases, the discussions regarding a stadium’s cultural significance have been controversial.

By nature, all modern Olympic stadiums are exceptional. Their singularity can be explained by their size and the universal value of the Games as propounded today by the International Olympic Committee. Moreover, all Olympic stadiums are related to some aspect of recent global history and hence, their significance goes far beyond their tangible values.

This paper will address the significance of the seven listed modern 20th-century Olympic stadiums in terms of intangible values (Kiuri, 2017; Kiuri and Teller, 2015a). The first section provides a brief description of the Olympic heritage origins; the second section refers to the 20th-century listed modern Olympic stadiums; the third section highlights their intangible values through the cases of these listed stadiums. The information on these cases is based essentially on official heritage authority texts. Last, the paper shall discuss in what manner the study of the intangible heritage of Olympic stadiums can be useful for studies of other historic stadiums.

OLYMPIC HERITAGE

“The Olympic Idea was born, making Olympia a unique universal symbol of peace and competition at the service of virtue. Here, too, prominence was given to the ideals of physical and mental harmony, of noble contest, of how to compete well of the Sacred Truce; values which remain unchanged in perpetuity.” (UNESCO, 1989).

The outstanding values of the Olympic Games of Antiquity were recognized when UNESCO added the Site of Olympia to the WCH list. The stadium at Olympia is an environmental, socio-cultural, and historical landmark. The space conceived for the Olympic event is a symbolically configured cultural space that lends significance to the whole stadium (Kiuri, 2009; Kiuri and Teller, 2015b; Kiuri, 2016). Another ancient stadium, the reconstructed Athens Panathenaic Stadium, was the place of the first modern Olympic Games in 1896. It was listed as National Heritage in 1998, one year after Athens was awarded the 2004 Olympic Games.

The Olympic Games of the modern era are, in a sense, a type of resurrected heritage with symbols, traditions and rituals (Kiuri, 2009; Kiuri and Teller, 2015a). French historian Pierre de Coubertin declared that the Olympic Games are not simply a championship because they also pay homage to their origins and values. In accordance with this, he promoted an International Architecture Competition to design a model site for a modern Olympia. The requirements for a unique ensemble, inspired by a sport-art binomial, in a harmonious landscape, a masterpiece of an architectural style, were published in Paris in 1910 under the title ‘*Une Olympie moderne*’. Later a concrete project was also studied for the area of Vidy in Lausanne.

De Coubertin’s vision also seems to have been influenced by the heritage principles of his time (Kiuri, 2021; Kiuri and Teller, 2015a). Thus, the Olympic Games, and their places, combine abstract principles with emotional dimensions highlighting their history, directing these values towards the field of instrumental values in modern society (for example educational values). ‘The revival of the Olympic Games through the efforts of Pierre de Coubertin illustrates the lasting nature of the ideals of peace, justice and progress, which (are) no doubt

the most precious but also the most fragile feature of the world's heritage' (criterion VI UNESCO, 1989).

20TH-CENTURY LISTED MODERN OLYMPIC STADIUMS

The 20th century left us a heritage of seven listed modern Olympic stadiums. Some of them still retain their original character while others have been transformed. In several cases, new major events after the Olympic Games induced important changes. Conflicts between conservation of heritage values and new uses can lead to de-listing and demolition like the case of the famous Empire Stadium that also hosted the Olympiad in London in 1948. In other cases, discussions arise on when the Games' history was negatively 'contaminated' by politics and ideological influences (Berlin, OG 1936).

Listed Olympic Stadium	Level and Type of Heritage
Olympic Stadium Stockholm (OG 1912)	Local Heritage: Building
Olympic Stadium Amsterdam (OG 1928)	National Heritage: Building
Olympic Stadium Los Angeles (OG 1932 & 84)	National Heritage: Landmark
Olympic Park of Berlin (OG 1936)	Local Heritage: Landscape
The Melbourne Olympic Complex (OG 1956)	National Heritage: Place
Olympic Stadium of Mexico City (OG 1968)	WCH: Site
Munich Olympic Stadium and Ensemble (OG 1972)	Local Heritage: Building; Ensemble (under WCH listing pr.)

Table I: Listed 20th-century modern Olympic stadiums (M. Kiuri)

The oldest listed modern stadium is the stadium of Stockholm (OG 1912), listed at the local level. The stadiums of Amsterdam (OG 1928) and Los Angeles (OG 1932 & 1984) are listed at the national level. The precinct of the Melbourne Complex (OG 1956) is listed as national heritage. The Olympia Park of Berlin (OG 1936) and the Munich Olympic Stadium (OG 1972) are listed as local heritage. The site of the Olympic Stadium of Mexico City (OG 1968) was listed as WCH in 2007. Listed objects are considered of national value, as in the case of Moscow 1980 (group of sculptures) and, of local value, as in the case of Sydney 2000 (the Olympic Cauldron). Currently the Munich Olympic Stadium and Ensemble are undergoing the WCH inscription process.

In the seven procedures that determine the listing of monuments throughout the world, there are differences with regard to values, but the fact of having hosted the Olympic Games was always decisive in the stadiums' listing, with their significance going far beyond their strictly architectural values (Kiuri and Teller, 2015a).

These Olympic stadiums are also related to some aspects of our recent history. For instance, the Mexico stadium is still associated with anti-racism history. Similarly, the stadiums of Los

Angeles and Moscow are linked to the political embargo on the Games during the Cold War years. The image of the Sydney stadium helps to address local history. The will to preserve 'national memory' has recently saved the Amsterdam Olympic stadium from demolition (Kiuri and Teller, 2015a).

PREVAILING INTANGIBLE VALUES IN LISTED 20TH-CENTURY MODERN OLYMPIC STADIUMS

This part of the paper will focus on the intangible values of the seven listed Olympic stadiums, as recorded in the corresponding official listing documents. It was observed that intangible values englobe all aspects related to the celebration of the Games such as sporting symbolism, history, performances associated with the stadium and the events. The success, popularity, uniqueness and rarity of the Olympic Games play an important role in stadium heritage nomination at local, national, and global levels (Kiuri and Teller, 2015a).

- i. The historical chronology of the Games as a sporting event is mentioned in most listing decisions: the Games' history itself is an important source of value for the Stadium.
- ii. The Olympic Games' preparation and celebration play a decisive role in a stadium's significance, bringing intangible values:
 - The number of sports in the programme, and participants are mentioned.
 - The sporting records made during the Games are very important.
 - The TV audience is evoked as evidence of the popularity of the Games and the value of the stadiums.
 - Innovation in managing certain sporting competitions is also identified.
 - The Games' ceremonies are appreciated for their value as socio-cultural events (Fig.1).
 - The community effort to prepare the Games is sometimes highlighted as an intangible value.
 - 'Civic groups' effort' to construct a stadium for the Games is also valued.
 - The political effort or consensus to prepare the Games is considered relevant.
 - Several official descriptions of listed stadiums evoke the value of 'prestige'.
- iii. Stadiums are directly related to historical events and memory: this is clearly the case for the Mexico City stadium associated with the silent protest by American athletes against the treatment of black people. Also, Mexico was the first place where a woman athlete lit the Olympic cauldron. In the Melbourne documents, the stadium appears as a 'place of historical events'.
- iv. Multifunctional use of the Olympic stadium is valued.
- v. Multisport use of the Olympic stadium is an asset.
- vi. The social dimension of the surroundings plays an important role in the significance of the stadium: the building's authenticity is a factor in the listing, but the recreational quality of its surroundings is part of the social dimension of the heritage values (the Munich 1972 ensemble) (Kiuri, 2021) (Fig. 2). Recreational values are mentioned in

terms of post-Games use to create urban models (Berlin) or sites with 'quality of life' (Mexico City) (ICOMOS, 2007).

- vii. Symbolic architectural elements, like the emblem of intangible values, are often more valued than architectural style.



Figure 1: Opening ceremony of the 1968 Summer Olympic Games at the *Estadio Olímpico Universitario* in Mexico City. Archivo: Enrique X. de Anda (Courtesy of E.X.deAnda, ICOMOS-Mexico)

All the documents analyzed highlight the importance of the 'Celebration of the Games' as a 'unique event' for the hosting city that motivates the achievement of civic objectives. All stadium descriptions refer to social and historical values. Mentions of its value as a 'place of records', site of an event (sport, social, cultural, political), and a 'place of memory', prevail.



Figure 2: *Olympiapark*, Munich today (M.Kiuri)

Olympic stadiums constitute a unique piece of heritage, both as a kind of singular architecture (a tangible heritage) and, as a testimony to the society that produced and uses these specific places (an intangible heritage) (Kiuri, 2021a). In other words, the history of architecture and sport are clearly interwoven in Olympic stadiums.

However, there is not enough research into their complex cultural significance (Kiuri, 2017; Kiuri and Teller, 2012). For example, the relation 'stadium-city' (the stadium's cultural space) or, the values evolution of the modern Games, need more study as does the ensemble of all Olympic stadiums from the perspective of WCH or, of intangible cultural heritage (Kiuri, 2009; Kiuri and Reiter, 2013).



Figure 3 (schema) : The intangible heritage profile of the Olympic stadium (M. Kiuri)

The above schema shows a synthesis of the Olympic stadium intangible heritage profile: the stadium as a cultural space, and the Olympic Games as a social practice (sport) with traditions, rituals, and socio-cultural events.

DISCUSSION

The question that then arises is “*Can Olympic stadium intangible heritage serve other historic stadium studies?*”

An Olympic Stadium’ cultural significance, right from the origins of the stadium, is linked to its space and to sport, and characterized by the specific interaction of tangible and intangible values. Knowledge in this field can contribute to better interpret the cultural significance of other 20th-century stadiums in many ways:

- Focusing on the role of intangible values related to sport.
- Indicating some additional social values linked to recreation and regeneration of urban strategies (Kiuri, 2017).
- Serving as an incentive for more research in this field. Heritage studies can also help academic education on sport architecture and future stadium design (Kiuri, 2021b, Kiuri and Reiter, 2013).
- Proposing approaches that respect both tangible and intangible values, a factor in the successful adaptation of historic stadiums: this will contribute to increasing their activities (as is the case of the Berlin Olympic stadium); on the other hand, some adaptations that are necessary to enhance their use can contribute additional tangible value to the stadium (the case of the Melbourne complex).

Olympic stadium heritage needs a specific approach because of the particular interconnection between the history of architecture and the history of sport, and of the importance of intangible values of these places (Kiuri, 2021; Kiuri and Teller, 2015). A similar approach may help the process of assessing the values of other emblematic 20th-century stadiums and their cultural significance.

CONCLUSION

This paper has focused on the intangible heritage profile of the 20th-century Modern Olympic Stadiums. Based on their historical roots in Antiquity, intangible values resurrected with the modern Olympic Games have influenced stadium architecture. The uniqueness of the modern Olympic Games, their preparation and celebration play a decisive role in a stadium's significance, as well as the social dimension to create areas for 'quality of life'. The continued use of these stadiums is considered a source of additional value, as long as the interplay between tangible and intangible values is respected. Olympic stadium heritage could contribute to better interpreting the cultural significance of other 20th-century stadiums, above all because the Olympic stadium's archetype tangibly expresses some of the highest intangible values.

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Credits

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Figure 2: Archives Enrique X. de Anda (Courtesy of Enrique X. de Anda, ICOMOS-México)

GLOSSARY

Tangible Heritage: Physical artefacts produced, maintained and transmitted intergenerationally in a society

Intangible Heritage: Nonphysical intellectual wealth