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# Bidding for Olympic and Paralympic games, a tool for transportation investments and tourism? The case of Istanbul

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## ABSTRACT

Since the start of the modern Olympic Games, and more recently the Paralympic Games, urban development linked to this mega-event has changed: the *mono-stadium* model typical of the early modern Games has been replaced by the model of an Olympic district. Because the events take place across multiple sites, the Games are often associated with investments in transportation. The paper aims to explore how, even in the case of a failed bid to stage the Olympic and Paralympic Games (OPGs), bidding for the Games can give rise to urban developments. In particular, bidding to host the Games can contribute to the reinforcement of transportation infrastructure. This study draws upon the case of the Istanbul bid. The Istanbul case is analyzed from the perspective of the bidding process before and after the reference to the Olympic Committee. The study examines the changes in the capacity of the transportation and tourist infrastructure through the official reports, statistics and annuals, as well as related literature. The case shows how bidding for big events such as the OPGs can drive investment and directly or indirectly impact economic activities, in particular in the tourism sector, whatever the result of the bidding process.

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## Introduction

It is not only economically developed countries that are keen to host mega-events such as the Olympic and Paralympic Games (OPGs), the World Cup, the Winter Olympics, etc. Developing countries too believe that these events will encourage economic and infrastructural development. According to Matheson (2013), improved infrastructure is one of the important outcomes of mega-events. However, such development is not necessarily the same for all countries. For economically developed countries, in particular, the benefits from such events are not as positive as expected. In the case of developing countries, however, they offer a real

chance for the host cities to strengthen their economies and their infrastructures (Matheson, 2013).

It is clear that the impact of the Games on infrastructure development in the host cities is remarkable. Although the high cost of infrastructure and government subsidies for the Games attract criticism because the post-event benefits do not live up to the promises, bidding to host a mega-event can attract investment by boosting a city's global reputation. The Olympic and Paralympic Games rank among the world's most iconic mega-events. However, the Games are about more than just sports. They generate large-scale social, economic and cultural interchanges with the participation of athletes and officials from multiple different nationalities. The international media showcase the most attractive aspects of the host city across the world. The Games provide a huge opportunity for marketing the city and attracting tourists. Mega-events provide an occasion for would-be host cities to improve their capacity in the economic, infrastructural, social and cultural spheres through the bidding process itself, whether or not their bid is successful.

Istanbul was among the bidders to host the Games in the years 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012 and 2020. Istanbul is a global, multicultural, cosmopolitan city located at the interface between Europe and Asia. Throughout its history, the city has always played an important role as a capital of the Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman Empires, and under the Republic of Turkey has remained the nation's economic, cultural, touristic and sports powerhouse, despite Ankara's position as the administrative capital. İstanbul generates 51% of Turkey's trade, 31% of its GNP, 52% of imports and 50% of exports, and is a transit point for foreign visitors on their way to the Middle East, North Africa and Eurasia (İstanbul Valiliği, 2019; TUIK, 2020). For decades, the city has experienced major urban development in transportation infrastructure, tourist capacity, the construction of financial hubs, and as a center for international sporting activities (Paköz, Baş, & Eren, 2019). All these factors were assets in its bid to become Turkey's host city for the Games.

Nevertheless, until the bidding for the 2012 Games, Istanbul essentially had no infrastructure in place for the Games apart from the Olympic Stadium on the outskirts of the city. However, in the bidding process for the 2020 Games, the Turkish Olympic Committee (TOC) drew up a master plan and the central government promised its backing for the Games in the construction of the Villages and other infrastructures (Figure 1).

Hosting the Games was one of the main aims of the TOC under the 2012–2016 Strategic Plan (Turkish National Olympic Committee, 2012). After the announcement of the National Strategic Plan for the Games in 2011, in collaboration with the central government, the city authority and



TOC, Istanbul applied to host the 2020 Games in competition with Madrid and Tokyo.

While the impacts of mega-events are extensively covered in the literature concerning the economic, social and cultural conditions before, during and after the hosting of such events, less scholarly attention has been paid to the impact on the candidate cities following an unsuccessful bid. In cases where cities have announced several investments associated with staging the Games, are these investments still pursued following an unsuccessful bid, or are they canceled? Do such investments make these cities more attractive, in particular with regard to transportation and tourism? This paper focuses on investment in transportation and tourism in Istanbul following an unsuccessful bid to host the Games. It shows that the bidding process itself made a significant contribution to Istanbul's development, despite the failure of the bid. It emphasizes the need for more analyses of the impact of the Games on economic, social and cultural conditions even in cities that have failed in their bid to host the Games.

### **Review of the literature relating to the bidding process, transportation and tourism**

The Olympic Games in their modern form started in 1896 and in more than a century the Games have become one of the world's best-known global events. Every four years, thousands of athletes, coaches, and volunteers, and millions of sports fans, come together to celebrate the global family of sport. Hundreds of institutions, officials and committees strive together to stage a mega-event that is both spectacular and safe (Kassens-Noor, 2020).

The construction of the White City Olympic Stadium for the 1908 London Games was the first example of such urban development (Liao & Pitts, 2006). In the second half of the 20th century, Games venues and Olympic Villages were the primary focus of construction and urbanization. During this period, infrastructure investment was limited, in no way approaching today's scale. It was with the Rome Olympics (1960) that the Games began to have a big impact on the local built environment, successively reflecting the need for urban expansion in the 1960s and 1970s, inner-city regeneration in the 1980s and 1990s, and sustainable urban form in the decades since. There is a clear interplay between the influence of the Olympics and the development of host cities (Liao & Pitts, 2006). Today, urban development linked with the Olympic Games goes well beyond the planning of competition facilities alone. To varying degrees, hosting of the Olympic Games generates an urban change in the form of new buildings and infrastructures and the construction of an Olympic Village. For example, the Organizing Committee of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG)

selected a neglected former industrial zone in Stratford in south-east London to build the Olympic Village and the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. It was an opportunity for more sustainable regeneration of the dilapidated area in the east of the city (Gold & Gold, 2014). In addition, the Olympic Delivery Authority, in charge of the public aspect of the Games and the development and construction of new venues and infrastructure, worked hand-in-hand with LOCOG to form the largest urban park to be created in Britain for over a century (Özfiliz, 2012). The London Games had a “Transport Legacy Action Plan” to reshape London’s transportation offering. The different components of the Plan were constructed with the aim of physically and behaviorally transforming London’s transportation legacy, and generating solidarity both between the six Olympic host boroughs and across London as a whole. The Greater London Authority saw the Games as a catalyst for the planning of an improved transportation system with enhanced accessibility and connectivity (Greater London Authority, 2012).

The kinds of effects that mega-events have on host cities and nations can be both economic and socio-cultural, bringing high-value investment, behavioral changes and long-term returns (Gursoy, Yolal, Ribeiro, & Panosso Netto, 2017). As Ribeiro and Almeida (2020) argue, one of the effects of the Games is to alter mobility behaviors (Ribeiro & Almeida, 2020). In addition, mega-events like the Olympic Games, the FIFA World Cup, World Expos, significantly impact governments, companies, institutions, civil society organizations, etc. by providing opportunities for changes to urban macro-forms, regulations and infrastructure, as well as to social attitudes (O’Brien, 2006). As Gibson et al. (2014) noted, mega-events begin to have an impact at the point when the authorities declare their intention to bid and these effects continue during the bidding, planning and construction phases as well as in the aftermath of the events (Gibson et al., 2014).

### ***Bidding process***

To begin with, for application to become a host city for the Games, candidates have to go through many stages. These stages are defined in the Olympic Charter under two main headings.<sup>1</sup> (Chapter 5, Rule 34—by-law to Rule 34. The Olympic Charter (OC) has been revised multiple times, most recently in 2019. In this study, OC 2007 is used, since it was the last charter before 2012 when Istanbul bid to host the Games.) First, there is the pre-bid stage, when potential candidates submit their applications to the International Olympic Committee (IOC). If the IOC decides that the candidate has met the requirements to bid for the Games, they go on to the second stage. In this stage, the candidacy process proper begins, during which all the applicants are assessed against multiple criteria, such as government support, general infrastructure, Olympic village,

accommodation, transportation planning, safety, security, legacy, etc. If the IOC decides that a city meets all requirements for the Games, it goes on a shortlist of final candidates.

During the bid process, cities and host countries often present the Games as a way to boost tourism<sup>2</sup> (Tourism is not always, however, the primary motivation for hosting the Games in developed countries (Rocha & Fink, 2017); the development of sports and urban regeneration are other motives.) (Boukas, Ziakas, & Boustras, 2013; Li & Blake, 2009; Sant, Mason, & Hinch, 2013; Williams & Elkhatab, 2012). For instance, the first objective of the organizers of the Sydney Games was to stimulate tourism by promoting Sydney and Australia as tourist destinations (IOBE, 2015). Likewise, in 2001, the main goal of the 2008 Beijing bid was to promote China as a tourist destination (Minnaert, 2012). London 2012 was perceived as a means to help the UK achieve annual visitor number of 40 million by 2020 (Visit Britain, 2012). Before the pandemic, Tokyo 2020 was also seen as a tool to boost tourism and to attract 40 million tourists to Japan by 2020 and 60 million by 2030, compared with 19 million in 2015. There was a similar expectation of a tourist legacy if Istanbul won the 2020 Games, with an expectation that some 55 million visitors would come to Turkey before, during and after the 2020 Games up to the year 2023<sup>3</sup> (However, the Covid19 pandemic has severely affected the tourist sector and the number of visitors fell by 12 million in 2020 compared with 2019. (Ministry of Culture & Tourism, 2021a)). However, Istanbul failed in its bid for the 2020 Games.

Mega-events bring a wide range of benefits and improvements to host cities and countries. The related studies have mostly focused on the economic impacts (Mair, Chien, Kelly, & Derrington, 2021; Ritchie, Chien, & Shipway, 2020) as well as the effects on tourist and visitor numbers (Fourie & Santana-Gallego, 2011). They also highlight the capacity of sports mega-events to improve the image of a city or a country by demonstrating their capacity to attract investment (Müller & Steyaert, 2013). Lastly, the literature highlights environmental impacts such as changes to land use and transportation systems (Karadakis & Kaplanidou, 2012; Preuss, 2013). However, there has been less scholarly interest in analyzing the effects of mega-events on cities that are unsuccessful in their bid to host the Games. Candidate countries that are not selected to stage the Games can nevertheless benefit from the bidding process itself (Fourie & Santana-Gallego, 2011). As Salisbury, Leopkey, and Tinaz (2017) showed, unsuccessful bids also have positive effects on would-be host cities. One of the outcomes of an unsuccessful bid is the opportunity for cities to market themselves and to invest in improving their international reputation. Another consequence is to eliminate conflict between different groups, whether private or public, and to unite them during the bidding process, creating partnerships that

generate new opportunities in environmental policies, infrastructure investment and the development of transportation and tourism (Salisbury et al., 2017). In addition, bids contribute to the improvement of sports facilities which in turn have wider effects on education, transportation, tourism, and social and cultural activities (Alberts, 2009).

Bidding for the Games helps local and central authorities to prepare development strategies, acting as a catalyst to convince stakeholders and residents who will pay a big share of the bill before, during and after events. As Yamawaki and Tomaz (2019) show in connection with the planning of the Beijing Games, the bidding process and the Games give new impetus to the city master plan. The city authorities use the bidding process as a catalyst for implementing the objectives of the master plan, especially regarding transportation infrastructure (Yamawaki & Tomaz, 2019). For the candidate countries, bid planners bring international know-how to the host city by drawing on the experience and knowledge of the IOC network. As a result, even if a city fails in its bid, it not only gains experience in the bidding process but also develops its international network and reputation. Moreover, because of IOC regulations, candidate cities have to draw up a master plan that is sufficiently visionary to convince the committee, with the result that local authorities enjoy a precious opportunity to implement their long-term planning strategies even if the bid is unsuccessful (Lauermann, 2014). Lauermann (2016) argued in his study that individual events such as the Olympics provide a way for city authorities to achieve their long-term planning outcomes. Bids to host the Games thus include urban development projects that were already on the drawing board. In addition, in the case of multiple successive bids as in the case of Istanbul, the same or similar projects remain on the table, and this continuity leads to better development within the context of the urban master plan (Lauermann, 2016).

Moreover, to address the IOC requirements, certain transportation investments have to incorporate IOC programs. These programs consist of some components and contain principles and suggestions for Olympics planning teams relating to transportation modes and operations, road design and structural transportation frameworks that are valuable not only during the Games but also as a subsequent legacy of the Games (Kassens-Noor, 2013).

### ***Transportation investments and tourism***

Mega-events have a massive impact on urban mobility and transportation planning as well as on tourism, driving major changes and developments within host cities. National and urban authorities leverage mega-events to enhance the global profile and reputation of their cities. The Games have been used to reinforce urban renewal, transportation infrastructure, sports facilities, and social and cultural amenities, as well as the environment

and infrastructural systems of the host cities since the Rome Olympics of 1960 (Essex & Chalkley, 1998).

The Olympics are thus associated with the introduction of new transportation facilities or improvements in existing transportation infrastructures or services. There are investments in urban transportation that bring about upgrades to the system at local level (subway lines, light rail systems, new rail stations, city center connections, new and revitalized parks, new high-capacity transit modes, additional road capacity, etc.) and also on larger scales (high-speed rail, new or upgraded airports or terminals) (Kassens-Noor, 2013; Yamawaki & Tomaz, 2019). This has been true of several Games—the first Shinkansen (bullet train), for example, was built for the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo. A new 3–4km rail loop and an Olympic rail station were built for the Sydney Games in 2000. In Athens, new transportation infrastructures (expressway, subway, rail connections) were built to link the historic center of Athens to a new international airport, and a new light-rail tramline connected the city center with the southern seacoast and a number of Olympic sites, etc. (Bovy, 2017). Those same Athens Olympics in 2004 also left an intangible legacy, bringing changes in the management of the Athens transportation system. They contributed to the Athenian transportation system by increasing integration between transportation modes and helping to synchronize transportation services (Kassens-Noor, 2017). For Beijing 2008, China invested in different transportation infrastructures by extending the subway network and building highways and a new airport terminal (Pop, Kanovici, Ghic, & Andrei, 2016). A new automated high-speed rail line between Beijing and Zhangjiakou was also built for the 2022 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games.

As well as transportation infrastructure, host cities have seen institutional changes in their transportation systems (Kassens-Noor, 2010), together with changes in management practices, regulations and institutional policies, such as the adoption of Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS), the creation of traffic management centers (TMC), the reorganization of transit routes, and the integration of transportation modes and pricing systems (Pereira, 2018). In Rio, for example, a new transportation agency was established to organize and plan all transportation infrastructure, such as new bus terminals, railroads, stations, etc. (Beyer, 2012).

Investments in transportation are made in advance in order to be able to compete with rival cities before the host city is designated. These investments contribute to improvements in intra-urban mobility, intercity mobility, and sometimes long-distance mobility. They help to make the city more accessible for both inhabitants and tourists.

There are two approaches to the allocation of transportation investment for mega-events, in terms of location and accessibility. In one case, mega-events are located in the outskirts and transportation investment is targeted

at improving access between these locations and the center. The Rome (1960) and Tokyo (1964) Games are examples of this approach, which enables the city to develop a new urban zone. In the second approach, the mega-event is located in the city center, and investment is targeted at improving urban transportation systems, leaving a long-term legacy of improved inner-city transit. Good examples of this approach are the Mexico Games of 1968 and the 1992 Games in Barcelona. For their part, the 2012 Games in London provide another good example of how the Games can contribute to the regeneration of a derelict part of the city.

Mega-events such as the Olympics can, as we have said, also boost tourism, not just by improving transportation but also by increasing accommodation capacity and prompting investment in amenities such as hotels, exhibition centers, and trade fairs. In particular, the Games drive growth in hotel capacity.<sup>4</sup> (And also, more recently an increase in the supply of temporary housing on platforms such as Airbnb (Delaplace, 2020)) The number of hotel rooms increased by 40% between 1994 and 2000 in Sydney, and in Rio by 93% between 2009 and 2016. There was similar growth associated with the games in Barcelona, Seoul and Atlanta (McKay & Plumb, 2001).

As noted by Fourie and Santana-Gallego (2011), mega-events can increase tourist footfall. However, as their study clearly shows, their impact on tourist capacity varies according to the nature of the events, the season and the participating countries (Fourie & Santana-Gallego, 2011). Some mega-events live up to expectations, as was the case with the 1994 Winter Olympic Games in Lillehammer (Teigland, 1999). In their study of mega-events in the BRICS countries, Pop et al. (2016) showed that, in addition to advertising via the usual media, promoting such events through tourist agencies is also critical to success in marketing the host city as a tourist destination. Tourists may want to visit the city not just for the events, but also for its cultural and historical qualities and the attraction of other parts of the host country (Pop et al., 2016). This allows the country an opportunity to show off its tangible and intangible heritage, such as its historical monuments, its food, its natural treasures, etc.

The Games do not always lead to a rise in tourism (Delaplace, 2020; Pop et al., 2016). Sometimes tourism increases during the Games, as happened in Rio. Sometimes, tourism actually declines. Indeed, while the Games can attract sports fans, they can also lead to the crowding-out of other types of tourists. The scale of the event and the expected congestion discourage leisure visitors and business travelers from coming to the city during this period (Matheson, 2006; Preuss, 2011). Even in the case of an unsuccessful bid, therefore, a candidate city may see a bigger rise in tourist capacity and numbers than if it actually hosted the Games, because the crowding-out effect does not occur.

## Methodology

Unfortunately, there has been little investigation of unsuccessful bids for the Games in the literature, so we are unable to compare our methodology with that of others. Moreover, there is a lack of data for a deep comprehensive quantitative analysis based on an unsuccessful bidding process. In this study, therefore, the case of Istanbul is analyzed for the duration of the Games bidding process before and after the application to the IOC.

### *Data collection*

To analyze the tourism capacity and changes in the number of activities such as conferences, exhibitions, fairs, and sports activities, we collected the data from:

- Institutional annuals of the Ministry of Tourism and Culture from 1990 to 2020
- Turkish Statistical Institute (TUİK) data from 2000 to 2020
- Statistics of the General Directorate of State Airports Authority from 2003 to 2020
- International Congress and Convention Association data in order to compare the number of meetings per city from 1963 to 2017.

To analyze how tourism has benefited from the bidding process or vice-versa, we present the changes in bed capacity, numbers of tourists, and numbers of exhibitions, fairs, etc. before and after the bidding process. Additionally, the General Directorate of State Airports Authority data was examined to analyze the changes in tourist arrivals in Istanbul.

We also describe the change in the capacity of the transportation infrastructure such as airports, high-speed railroads, highways, and inner-city transit links such as the subway system, trams, bus rapid transit (BRT) etc. before and after the bidding process. For this analysis, we collected the data from;

- Annuals and reports of the Turkish Railway Administration (TCDD) from 2000 to 2020,
- Annuals of the General Directorate of Highways from 1990 to 2020,
- Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality-Metro Istanbul transportation reports and data from 2000 to 2020,

Lastly, geographical data obtained from the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and the ArcMAP GIS program is used to map and visualize the changes in urban macroform. This allows us to show how transportation capacity changed in the decades before and after big transportation

investment moves associated with bidding for the Games in the midst of these investments in the Games.

### **Data analysis**

To figure out the changes in the shape of the city's transportation infrastructure, the urban macroform was matched with the transportation systems as well as the Olympic Village and other Games-related areas. In addition, the development of transit networks such as the subway, tram, and bus rapid transit systems was analyzed to specify how the Olympic Games and transportation modes improved in tandem in the years between 2000 and 2020.

Moreover, tourism data were examined for possible correlation between tourism policies and the number of tourist arrivals, meetings and mega-events in Turkey. A cross-tab image was produced to compare the capacity for tourism activities in different cities.

### **Empirical results on transportation investments associated with the bidding process and on tourism policies and their impacts on tourist arrivals in Istanbul**

Istanbul went through all the stages of the bidding process to host the 2020 Games and declared as a candidate city in May, 2012, shortlisted alongside Tokyo and Madrid.

#### **Bidding process for Istanbul**

The bidding for the 2020 Games was accompanied by a strategic plan drawn up by the TOC, whereas there was no plan associated with the earlier bids for 2000, 2004, 2008 and 2012 Olympics. *Introducing the Turkish Nation to the World, Inspiring the Turkish Nation with the Olympic Spirit* was the mission of the Strategic Plan (Turkish National Olympic Committee, 2012). In addition, Istanbul had a global vision to which the Games were to contribute by raising the profile of the city on the world stage.

By the year 2012, the TOC had started the bidding process for the 2020 Games, with the public support of the central government and the local authorities. All the requirements were defined and a master plan was drawn up in 2013. Construction on many of the projects set out in the master plan began in the months that followed and finished before the IOC announced the host of the 2020 Games.

Although the Turkish bid for the 2020 Games was an improvement on the previous bids in terms of social and cultural content, infrastructural capacity, and mega-event experience, the IOC awarded the Games to

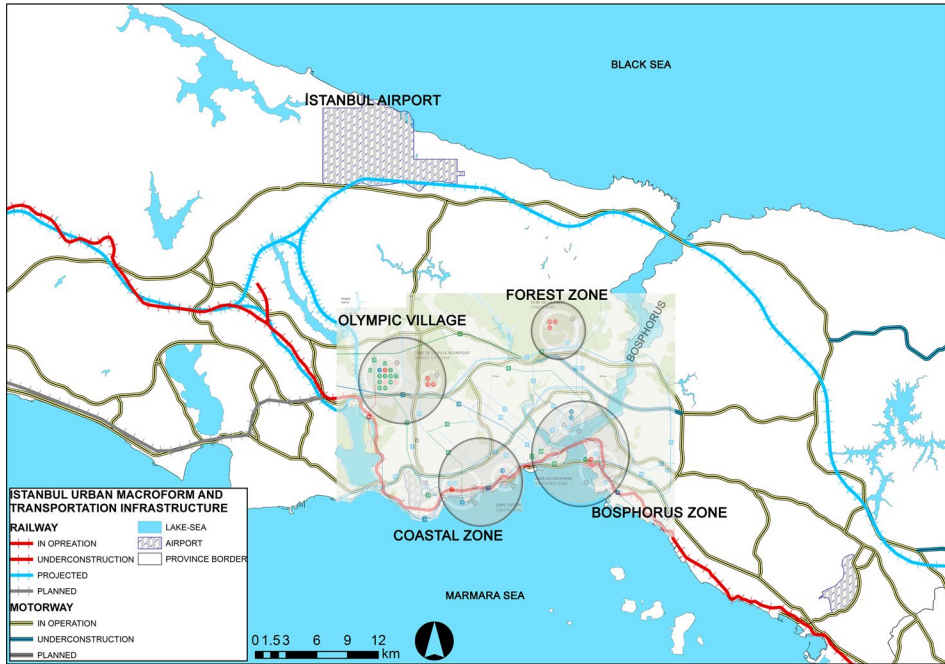
Tokyo. However, this announcement did not affect Turkish investment in tourism and transportation infrastructure.

### **Transportation investment in Istanbul**

According to the Turkish Strategy for Tourism; *2023 is an effort that aims to providing extensions to management and implementation of strategic planning efforts and boosting the cooperation between public and private sectors of tourism with reference to the principle of -governance-* (Ministry of Culture & Tourism, 2007). In light of this objective, therefore, one of the strategies to strengthen the tourist sector involved the development of transportation and infrastructure. To improve the transportation infrastructure, the main issues were defined and solutions decided, for example enhancing airport access, improving interregional rail links, increasing the safety and accessibility of highway transportation<sup>2</sup> (Ministry of Culture & Tourism, 2007).

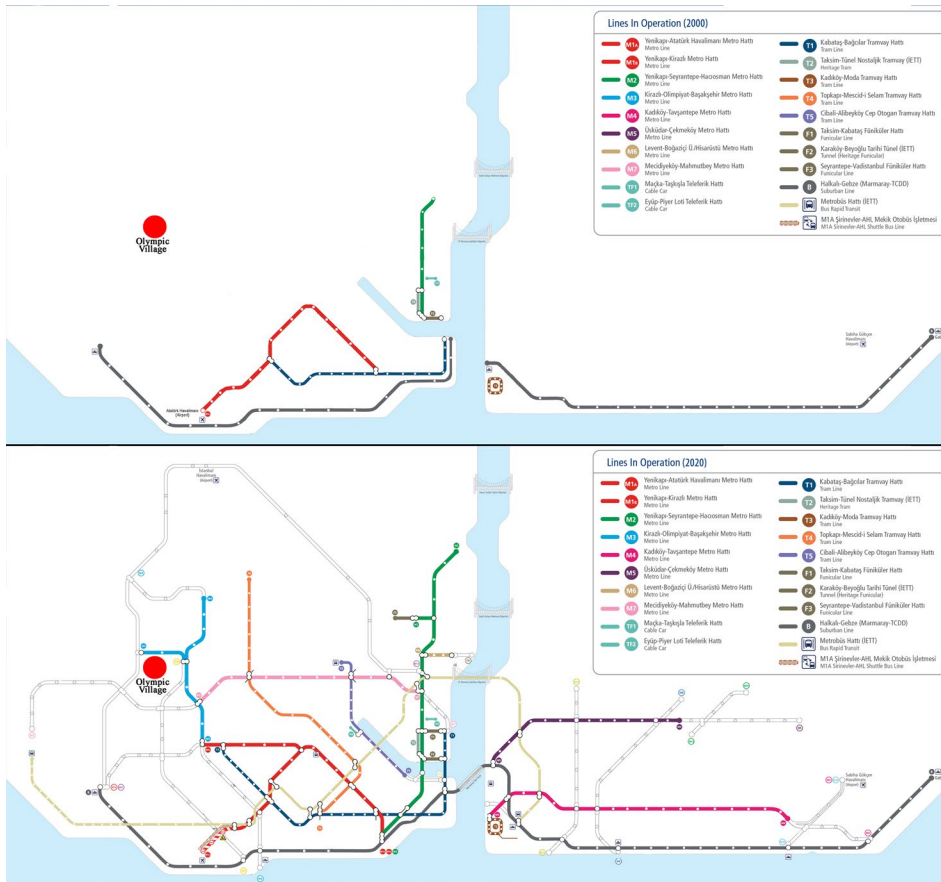
As noted above, transportation investments have a significant impact on the movement of people and goods. As a major global event, the Olympic Games affect the movement of people all around the world. The event directly affects transportation investment because of the Games Charter. At the start of the 2020 bidding process, the Central Turkish Authorities, the Governor of Istanbul and the Mayor of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality announced that they would support the Games either by building new transportation infrastructure or by upgrading the existing systems. This support would take the form of new investment in transportation in Istanbul, which could be either public or private, or involve public-private partnerships as in the case of new highways in Istanbul such as the North Marmara Highway and Eurasia Tunnel. For these two projects, construction on the tunnel began in 2011 and it opened in 2016, while construction of the highway started in 2014 and was completed in 2021. Both provide alternatives to routes within the city as well as international links. In addition, and more importantly, they connect the Olympic Village and sports areas in the southern and northern parts of the city (Figure 1). Although there was less transport infrastructure construction to make the Games village accessible for visitors before 2012, in the last decade all the Games village and sports areas have been connected via highways and railways (Figures 2 and 3).

One of the other big investments in transportation infrastructure is a high-speed train (HST) line in Istanbul, on which construction began in 2006. It passes under the Bosphorus and connects to Halkalı station on the European side of the city.<sup>5</sup> (Ankara-Eskişehir HST line established in 2009 and the line extended to İstanbul-Pendik (Asian side) in 2014 and İstanbul-Halkalı (European side) in 2019.) The HST line brings almost 25



**Figure 2.** The Games villages and transportation infrastructure development in Istanbul from 1990 to 2020. *Source:* Authors based on (KGM, 2019; Metro Istanbul, 2021; TCDD, 2019; Turkish National Olympic Committee, 2012).

million people to just three hours of Istanbul. The line came into full operation in 2019 and, according to the Turkish Railway Administration (TCDD) data, nearly 3 million passengers traveled by HST in 2019 (TCDD, 2020). The line extends to Ankara and Konya, two of Turkey's biggest metropolitan areas, as well as a big spiritual center in the case of Konya (Mawlana Celeleddin Rumi). So, if Istanbul had been hosting the Games, foreign visitors and other people interested in the Games would have been able to reach these cities easily in a day by high-speed train. HST has thus added new alternative tourist destinations. At the beginning of 2020, over 7 million passengers had used HST in Turkey, though the numbers using this as well as other transportation modes had fallen by the end of 2020 (TUIK, 2021b). Further investment in transportation infrastructure in Istanbul has been the construction of subway lines. Up to the year 2010, there were just 44.7km of February track in Istanbul, a figure that increased to 206.5km in just 10 years, constructed to serve the Olympic Village and other sports facilities (Figure 3). In addition, more than 250km of lines are under construction and completion is expected by the year 2023. These new lines will link the new Istanbul Grand Airport, located in the northern part of the city on the European side close to the Black Sea, to the Olympic Village. Almost 3 million passengers a day used these metro lines in Istanbul in 2019 before the start of the Covid-19 pandemic (IETT, 2021).



**Figure 3.** Changes in the metro, tram, cable car, funicular and BRT lines in Istanbul from 2000 (above) to 2020 (below). *Source:* Author based on (Metro Istanbul, 2021; TCDD, 2019).

As can be seen, therefore, Istanbul substantially increased its investment in transportation. Total foreign arrivals in 2019 stood at over 65 million passengers, a figure that plunged to 21 million in 2020 as the pandemic hit international flights. According to forecasts, in the absence of a pandemic, total international arrivals would have exceeded 100 million in 2021 (DHMI, 2021). However, even with the pandemic, in April 2021 Istanbul Grand Airport was Europe’s busiest airport with 23.4 million passengers (FTN News, 2021).

**Tourism policies and investments**

Istanbul is keen to host the Games. When it last bid for the Games, in 2012 for the 2020 Olympics, the city produced a well-prepared bid dossier, in which investment in tourism and transportation infrastructures were the strongest components. Though there was no action plan for tourism in Turkey before 1980, the trend toward liberalization had a big impact

on the tourist sector after 1982, with new legislation to encourage tourism. The government subsidizes the sector and offers several exemptions to entrepreneurs along with tax incentives (Uysal, 2015). According to the Strategic Plan (2012) and Tourism Master Plan (2007), Turkey would increase its tourist capacity by increasing the number of beds, improving the quality of accommodation, developing communication with stakeholders, restoring and rehabilitating heritage, enhancing access to tourist destinations, and creating new destinations and facilities (Ministry of Culture & Tourism, 2007; Turkish National Olympic Committee, 2012). Under Turkey's Strategic Plan for Tourism (2007), the number of foreign tourists is expected to reach 63 million and predicted tourist revenues 86 billion dollars by the year 2023. The Strategic Plan describes the instruments for fulfilling the goals, one of which is to increase accommodation capacity in Turkey's cities (Ministry of Culture & Tourism, 2007).

Istanbul had no specific policy for tourism until the mid-2000s, but before the bid for the 2020 Games, Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and Istanbul 2010 European Capital of Culture Agency (ECCA) started to draw up a tourism policy for the city, following the selection of Istanbul as the European Capital of Culture in 2010. The ECCA worked to build Istanbul's global image and to promote tourism with IMM and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. This step has been critical in increasing the awareness of tourism in the city.

### ***The increase in tourism in Istanbul***

The bidding policy, the associated investment in transportation, and the policy for tourism together led to an increase in tourist facilities and tourist arrivals. For instance, the total number of social and cultural facilities stood at around 850 in 2007, but had risen to almost 1250 just three years later. According to ICCA data on the number of meetings per city, Istanbul experienced a remarkable increase in meeting facilities between 1963 and 2012, although the city had dropped out of the top ten list by 2017 (Figure 4), probably affected by the attempted military coup in 2016.

Figure 5 shows that travel, entertainment, and sports or cultural activities account for almost 60% of the total reasons given for visiting Turkey in the last decade, as compared with 45-50% before the bid for the 2020 Games. During this period, Istanbul also hosted many international mega-events like the UEFA Championship Final (2005), the Turkish F1 Grand Prix (2005–2011 and 2020), CEV Women's Championship (2011), World Wrestling Championship (2011), FIFA U-20 World Cup (2013), FIBA EuroBasket Championship (2017). In addition, UEFA decided to stage the 2020 Championship Final in Istanbul, though this event was delayed because of the pandemic (UEFA, 2021).

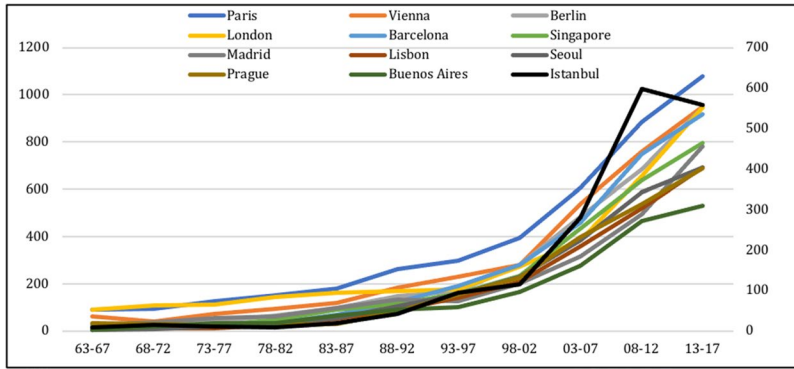


Figure 4. Number of meetings per city from 1963 to 2017 (ICCA, 2018).

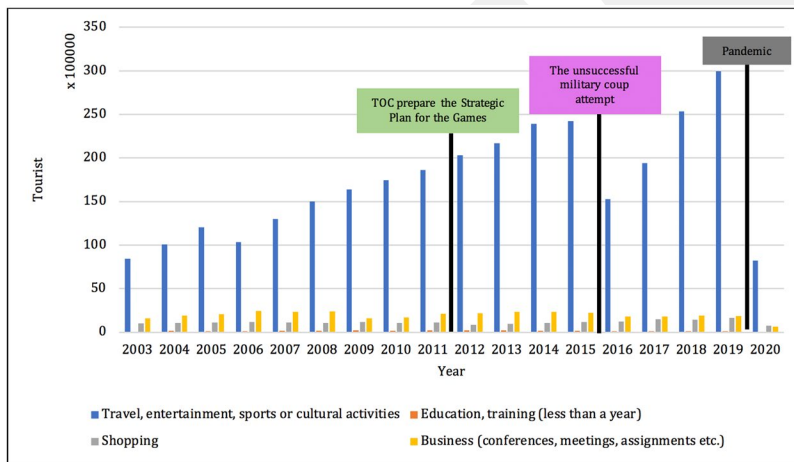
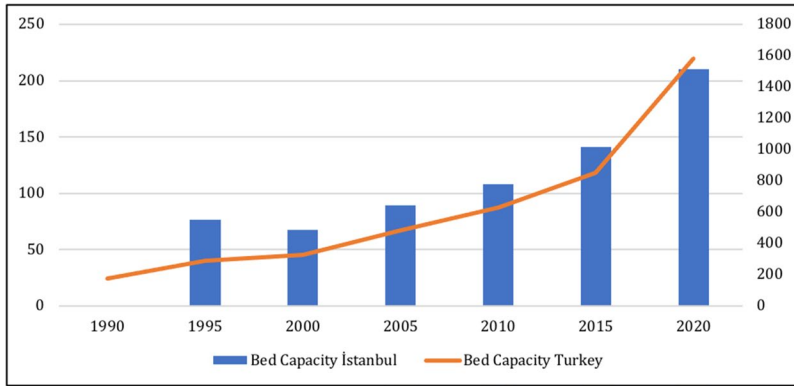


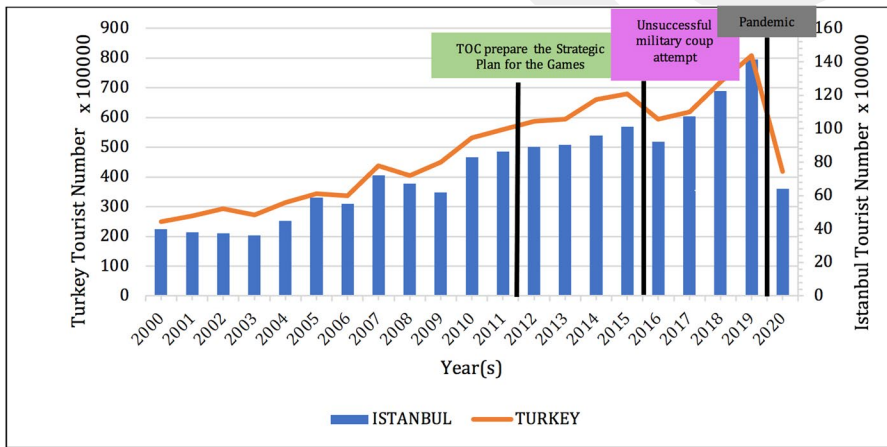
Figure 5. Purpose of visits to Turkey by foreign tourists from 2003 to 2020 (TUIK, 2021c).

Since the Turkey Tourism Strategic Plan (2007) and the Strategic Plan for the Games (2012), numbers of foreign tourists have grown. This increase has temporarily stopped, first as a result of the attempted military coup and second as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

To illustrate this situation, Figure 6 shows how bed capacity changes in Istanbul and Turkey from 1990 to 2020. The tourist sector developed very fast over the three decades, and Istanbul currently has bed capacity of more than 210,000, which is three times as high as it was in 2000. This big rise in bed capacity continued and accelerated after 2010, when Turkey decided to bid for the Games and drew up a master plan for the Games as well as improving tourist capacity. Accommodation capacity increased steadily by 20,000 beds in each of the five years from 2000 to 2005 and from 2005 to 2010, but the rate of increase accelerated rapidly from 20,000 to 33,000 between 2010 and 2015 and continued from 2015 to 2020 to reach over 70,000 by 2020.



**Figure 6.** Changes in bed capacity in Istanbul and in Turkey from 1990 to 2020. *Source:* Authors based on (Ministry of Culture & Tourism, 2021a, 2021b; TÜİK, 2021a)



**Figure 7.** Number of total tourist arrivals in Istanbul and Turkey from 2000 to 2020. *Source:* Authors based on (Ministry of Culture & Tourism, 2021a, 2021b; TÜİK, 2021a)

Domestic and foreign tourist arrivals have also increased in the last twenty years, in parallel with bed capacity. The total number of tourist arrivals went up from 6 million to 14 million in Istanbul in the last ten years (Figure 7)

As can clearly be seen from Figure 7, after 2012 when Turkey entered its bid for the 2020 Games, the number of tourist arrivals increases regularly until the attempted military coup in 2016. Although there is a sharp fall in 2016, the upward trend resumes in 2017 and continues until the pandemic in 2020. All in all, the Turkey Tourism Strategic Plan (2007) and the Strategic Plan for the Games (2012) contributed to the Turkish tourism sector—as well as to tourism in Istanbul—by enhancing accommodation capacity.

In summary, the rapid growth of the tourist sector in both Turkey and Istanbul in recent years owes much to mega-events. Such events, as well as the bid to host the Olympic Games, have played a critical role in this growth. The Olympic bid helped the city to increase its tourist capacity in

many ways, for example by increasing bed numbers, improving interconnection points through airports and railroads, boosting the city's global marketing and raising the global international profile of Istanbul. Statistics and data show that bidding to host mega-events can contribute to the tourist sector even if the bid is unsuccessful and the event never comes to the city. Moreover, transportation investments like HSR lines and the new Istanbul Grand Airport not only benefit the city but also contribute to the tourism sector across Turkey by improving transportation links and accessibility.

## Results and discussion

This study makes many key contributions to the literature on mega-events, with specific reference to the Olympic and Paralympic Games. The study contributes to the literature in a domain where little research has been done, by examining the effect of Istanbul's unsuccessful bid to host the Olympic and Paralympic Games. It shows that an unsuccessful bid can also lead to improvements in transportation and tourist infrastructure in the candidate city. Obviously, it must be acknowledged that many such urban changes and much investment also occur in cities without the Olympics, but this study demonstrates that the prospect of the Games can act as a catalyst for urban renewal. They allow governments and local authorities an opportunity to progress the city's long-term planning, and bring many benefits in terms of financial inputs, global marketing, forward vision, etc. The case of Istanbul provides a good example of this process.

Concerning the legacy of Istanbul's bid to host the Games, if the city eventually hosts the Olympics in the future, there is no doubt that it has already put in place investments in transportation and tourism that give it the capacity to welcome sports fans, committees, institutions, officials, and all the other groups that form around such an event. It may take a long time to prepare, but ultimately the city has gained many benefits from the bidding process even if has so far been unsuccessful in its bids. In Istanbul, therefore, the bidding process is an example of how a mega-event can help a candidate city to develop its social, environmental and economic assets by drawing on international networks and institutional experience.

This article has looked at the positive effects of the Games in most cases, but the Games have also had negative impacts in the form of sports centers such as the Atatürk Olympic Stadium in Istanbul. There were many downsides to the location of this stadium in terms of climatic conditions and accessibility when it first opened in 2002. First, there were no road and rail connections to the stadium until 2014. In addition, the stadium has a capacity of over 80,000 spectators, which means that football teams are not keen to play there because of the number of empty seats.

This investment is a permanent legacy, yet the stadium has hosted relatively few sporting events in the last 20 years. It represents an example of the potential disadvantages of permanent investment if a building is poorly conceived and hard to access.

## **Conclusion**

### ***Key findings***

This paper argues that bidding to host the Olympic Games is not just about meeting formal criteria—it is a more comprehensive process that enables potential host cities to develop their vision and investment strategies. Although Istanbul lost the competition to host the 2020 Games, the bid for the Games was accompanied by investment that led to the implementation of Master Plan decisions in the form of projects that have been realized. The city continues to improve its knowledge, infrastructure, and human capacity not only for the Games, but also in its drive to become a global city. Istanbul has gained benefits from its bids to host the Games in the shape of new transportation infrastructure and tourist amenities. Although the city was not awarded the 2020 Games, the process resulted in considerable development of its economic, social, cultural, and transportation capital.

One of the other positive outcomes of the bidding process has been the enhancement of the city's global reputation. As can clearly be seen from the data on tourism in the last decade, Istanbul's appeal to foreign and local tourists has grown in parallel with the appeal of Turkey as a whole, especially since the 2012 bidding process, and despite unforeseen circumstances like the military coup attempt in 2016 and the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. The result of Istanbul's bid suggests that mega-events can act as a catalyst for the construction of new urban amenities and the improvement of transportation infrastructures, even when the city is unsuccessful in its attempt. Hosting the Games is nevertheless also a political issue.

### ***Limitations***

This paper also has certain limitations concerning its generalization of the effects of the bid for the Games on investment in transportation and tourism. First, there is no doubt that this investment is not solely attributable to the Games, but is influenced by multiple other parameters and factors. Nevertheless, as with other large investments, it is difficult to separate the effect of the Games from other factors in the development of urban transportation and tourism. Moreover, because the bidding process was unsuccessful, data and information for Istanbul are lacking.

Nonetheless, this paper can play a part in stimulating broader national and international studies on the impact of bidding for the Olympic Games on transportation and tourism in cities that have been unsuccessful in their bids, even if the number of such cities is shrinking because of opposition to the Games on the part of local and national populations.

## Notes

1. Chapter 5, Rule 34 – by-law to Rule 34. The Olympic Charter (OC) has been revised multiple times, most recently in 2019. In this study, OC 2007 is used, since it was the last charter before 2012 when Istanbul bid to host the Games.
2. Tourism is not always, however, the primary motivation for hosting the Games in developed countries (Rocha & Fink, 2017); the development of sports and urban regeneration are other motives.
3. However, the Covid19 pandemic has severely affected the tourist sector and the number of visitors fell by 12 million in 2020 compared with 2019 (Ministry of Culture & Tourism, 2021b).
4. And also, more recently an increase in the supply of temporary housing on platforms such as Airbnb (Delaplace, 2020)
5. Ankara-Eskişehir HST line established in 2009 and the line extended to İstanbul-Pendik (Asian side) in 2014 and İstanbul-Halkalı (European side) in 2019.

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