

Cultural mega-events in heritage-rich cities: Insights from the European Capital of Culture and broader policy perspectives

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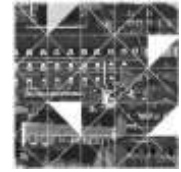
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CIDADES, Comunidades e Territórios



Cultural mega-events in heritage-rich cities: Insights from the European Capital of Culture and broader policy perspectives

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Abstract

The European Capital of Culture (ECoC) is a well-known and long-standing European policy that annually awards the title of Capital to two or more cities that deliver cultural initiatives throughout one year of celebrations. The programme has been hosted by over 60 cities throughout Europe during the last 35 years. Some host cities have used the ECoC to develop large projects that contribute to urban rebranding and regeneration (e.g. the facilities on the new waterfront of Marseille, made for the 2013 ECoC) and, more frequently, projects that adapt existing facilities and places, or smaller scale and less spectacular interventions in the city fabric. As a wide variety of differing cities have hosted the event, the ECoC has contributed to urban transformations at different scales, often with particular reference to historic and heritage-rich settings, but also brings about long-term effects in terms of cultural facilities and venues, tourism appeal and even the intangible heritage narratives attached to places. Drawing on the HOMEE Research Project and on recent publications by the authors, this paper discusses the range of large-to-small-scale planning, the (re)generation of cultural facilities and places in historic cities and heritage-rich areas to accommodate cultural mega-events and the effects they have on host cities over time. In the conclusions, the paper expands beyond the ECoC (in the direction of sport mega-events) to consider and highlight forthcoming challenges for urban policy-making and the planning of mega-events in Europe.³

Keywords: Cultural mega-events, heritage-rich cities, European Capital of Culture, Olympics.

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³ The authors were invited to submit this article after the “Grands Projects: Urban Legacies of the late 20th Century” (Mega-events and Mega-projects: Trends and Demands track). This article draws on and includes excerpts from previous publications: Ponzini et al., 2019; Ponzini et al. 2020a; Ponzini et al. 2020b; Jones and Ponzini 2021; Ponzini and Jones 2021; Jones 2020; Jones 2021; Ponzini 2021. These publications are connected to the HOMEE Research Project, that this webpage describes in detail: <http://www.tau-lab.polimi.it/research/homee>

1. The overlap between cultural heritage and mega-events

For more than 35 years, European cities have been shifting their economic base following periods of deindustrialization in order to become more globally competitive. Towards this end many cities have come to promote culture and heritage as part of these new reorientation strategies (Bianchini and Parkinson, 1993; Willems, 2014). Within these approaches, city decision makers and politicians have come to turn to mega-events as a tool to invest in and promote the city. The literature frames mega-events as both a means to boost infrastructural investments, ignite tourism and improve the image of the city (Jones and Ponzini, 2018). Their use ranges from accelerators and amplifiers of urban development processes to broader city transformations more generally. One main area of investment tends to be in local and regional infrastructure (Kassens-Noor, 2012) though the increase in available funds may also help to conserve and promote heritage in historic cities while also injecting new functions in underused spaces or structures.

Heritage icons can potentially also serve as existing symbols for events to center on and strengthen as part of the city image while simultaneously growing public interest in heritage. Another area of overlap between events and heritage can be found in the new management and governance networks fostered by mega-events which may come to encompass local heritage policy making and related actors as well. Supporting these potential overlaps, one can also observe a trend of cities rejecting the ‘bigger is better’ approach to hosting mega-events, instead increasingly intending use of existing or temporary venues as well as rejecting mega-events entirely (International Olympic Committee, 2014). Though such approaches may be innovative in sport mega-events, cultural mega-events like the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) have long tended towards an approach that focuses on utilizing the existing spaces and places of cities (European Commission, 2014). In a recent publication, Jones (2020) systematized these two emerging perspectives, framing ‘cultural mega-events’ as paradigmatic of a diffused spread approach to hosting large events. This diffusing of events has become an increasingly vital approach in response to hosting events during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic along with a growing interest in smaller events and the reduction of spectacle (Di Vita & Wilson, 2021).

Until recently, the emphasis of mega-event planning had been largely placed on the creation of new or expanded infrastructure, new iconic stadiums and the construction of other facilities needed to host events. However, as can be seen in the latest proposals for the Olympic Games, organizers are increasingly turning to the re-use of existing facilities, the conversion of inner-city areas, and the regeneration of neighborhoods rather than focusing on developing entirely new areas from scratch. For heritage-rich European cities, this shift in paradigm represents both an opportunity and a threat at the historic urban landscape scale (Bandarin & Van Oers, 2012 and 2015; Bianchini & Borch, 2018) and signals an opportunity to investigate the similarities and differences in these approaches between sport and cultural mega-events. Regardless of the specific contents, all mega-events in heritage-rich cities and historic areas imply potential threats, frictions and risks, from physical changes or adaptations to the built environment, new heritage narratives or interpretations that may support the mega-event but which obliterate the meanings and roles of local communities over the long term and risking the reservation of heritage spaces for tourists. The case of Liverpool being removed from the UNESCO World Heritage list in 2021 cannot lead one to say that a mega-event (in this case the 2008 ECoC) can induce such detrimental effects altogether. However, the pro-growth approach to urban regeneration and marketing that was reinforced by the planning of the mega-event and by subsequent operations dominated both new projects and the use of heritage sites (West, 2021). This contributed to the process of de-listing. In this article we derive substantial inspiration from these findings and primarily focus on the observed relationships between cultural mega-events and cities and places that are rich in terms of tangible and intangible heritage.

One extreme manifestation of this emerging threat may be the spectacularization, standardization or instrumentalization of local culture and heritage in the festivalization of cities (Beriatos and Gospodini, 2004). On the opposite end, it is true that heritage can constitute an important opportunity to the planning and implementation of mega-events while still introducing additional restrictions. For example, the image and appeal of a city while bidding as the host of a mega event or as a tourist destination for mega-event attendance-cum-local/regional-visit

may lever its cultural heritage, its historic places and iconic buildings as settings or backgrounds of events, which may also risk minimizing their significance and meaning (Ponzini, 2021; Tommarchi and Bianchini, 2021; Purchla, 2021). On the contrary, heritage preservation stakeholders may hold veto powers that can delay mega-event related projects that typically have quite strict and restrictive deadlines (Jones and Ponzini, 2018). This paper presents an overview of these opportunities and threats as identified within the HOMEE project while also anticipating how these issues will be relevant for future cities hosting cultural mega-events in Europe along with other types of mega-events like the upcoming Olympic Games to be hosted in Paris in 2024 and Milan-Cortina in 2026. In the case of Paris 2024, a wide set of heritage sites and buildings will be used and adapted for the 2024 Olympics, rising significant concerns (Gravari-Barbas, 2021).

The contents of the article are inspired by previous publications of the project and in particular derive from three existing publications that derive from the HOMEE Research Project. The main contribution of this work is in presenting the four key themes that have emerged from the study of cultural mega-events and discuss their future applicability for other types of mega-events. The team of involved researchers has investigated five past case-study events to develop new policy tools for dealing with the emerging opportunities and threats in planning and implementing mega-events within heritage-rich contexts. Used methodologies included literature review, document analysis of local, national, and international plans and policies as well as interviews with a diverse range of stakeholders. The four key themes presented here emerge from the issues uncovered and addressed in the research, the approach and methodologies implemented as well as a framework of the collective findings from the various cases studied. In presenting these four key themes this paper argues for their importance in framing and developing future mega-event policy within contexts that include important tangible and intangible heritage. This contribution also aims to push the study of mega-events to go beyond restrictive typological boundaries (e.g. sport mega-events vs. cultural mega-events). The aim is to reflect on the potential learning that can be transferred among different types of mega-events. As past research has shown, there can be challenges in the transfer of learning, even within the case of one city hosting multiple events (Jones, 2021), as well as the potential for mega-events to spawn varying spinoff events as part of their legacy (Jones & Ponzini, 2021). There is a clear need for an improved transfer of knowledge and learning from one mega-event to another as well as across different types of mega-events as we argue in this paper.

2. Four key themes for heritage-rich cities hosting mega-events

The key themes in this article draw on five case studies across Europe (Ponzini et al. 2020a) that provided the basis to study a similar set of issues across a variety of European contexts, leading to a number of common as well as unique opportunities and threats identified. The five cases studied were the Genoa 2004 ECoC, Milan 2015 Expo, Wroclaw 2016 EcoC, Hull 2017 UKCoC and the Pafos 2017 EcoC while an additional study of Matera-Basilicata 2019 EcoC was carried out during the year of celebration (Ponzini et al., 2020b). Other publications present certain aspects of these cases and issues in far greater depth, analyzing a range of additional specific themes emerging in each case (see Di Vita, 2021; Dova et al., 2021; Jones 2021; Sanetra-Szeliga, 2021; Tommarchi and Bianchini, 2021). The interest here is to focus instead on the four key themes that derived from the combined study rather than case specific aspects. The four main themes will be discussed in the following sections: Context matters for mega-events in heritage-rich cities; Long-term vision and spatial planning; Governance and local capacity building; Heritage, identity, and local communities.

These four key themes derived from collecting the shared opportunities and threats between the five cases. Despite their many differences in terms of city size, population as well as kinds of heritage, these four themes represent critical aspects which should inform and guide the planning and development of mega-events in heritage-rich cities. However, the research uncovered many instances where these aspects were either missing or not developed enough. For example, plans tell about the mega-event legacy and long-term development vision for the city, but often they only extended until the end of the events themselves or they do not have a clear continuation or link with post-event approaches. One other relevant issue is participation. While many of the cases did include varying periods and approaches to public participation within their event plans, some cities have not used participatory

processes consistently or continuously over time. In other moments there were risks that one main heritage identity was promoted or the local community was framed as a singular community, overlooking the presence of other groups with different histories and stories. This learning from the research emphasized again the value and the importance of these four key themes and the need for decision makers to be reflecting on these aspects early on in the process of planning and preparing for events.

The following sections present in greater detail the specifics of the four themes. They are first discussed more broadly with evidence collected from across the case studies and then followed with a specific example from the HOMEE Research Project. Each of these examples helps to clarify the core concepts of the theme but represents just one individual iteration and is by no means intended to be generalized or to reflect the full range of possible experiences. These examples have been pulled from the extensive research carried out as they best highlight key elements succinctly. However, as noted above, more information on these examples as well as others from the case studies carried out can be drawn on from existing publications.

2.1. Context matters for mega-events in heritage-rich cities

The different planning systems and institutional settings studied by the HOMEE project confirmed significant aspects, specifically in terms of what can be accomplished through such events in relation to heritage and what reasonably could not, in other words the actual potential for mega-events to intervene on the historic urban landscape. For the same reason, the interaction between mega-event planning activities and heritage policies substantially differs across the cases, demonstrating the wide potential of such events. We found that in certain instances host cities used their heritage strengths for building their image and visibility, while in others problematic aspects were intentionally downplayed whereas in other cases heritage formed the core of the program. Some heritage projects within the events appeared only at the margins or only as collateral aspects emerging ex-post. Perhaps due to the size and economic relevance in their respective city, each process related to mega-event planning, delivery, and legacy has clearly different features from the other cases, but each one was without a doubt mega-sized at least in terms of its effects in the evolution of the host city, constituting a clear turning point. In some instances, this change was observed in spatial planning that went beyond the specific mega-event interventions, yet in all cases there was a clear transformation of the urban environment, its heritage and perception. Within these processes host cities adjusted their visions based on the context while also introducing significant elements to its planning toolbox as a result of hosting the ECoC event.

As noted in many past mega-events, we also observed the acceleration and amplification of various urban processes. In some cases, policy makers and stakeholders had pre-existing objectives and target areas for the city to develop, redevelop, reuse, or transform, with the event allowing them to signify, promote, and infuse areas with new meanings and images. In some cases, these processes emerged only as the planning for the event unfolded or in preparation of post-event management. In studying the ECoC we found that they were quite adaptable in their target areas, spatial arrangements, and distribution of benefits compared to many past sport mega-events. In most cases they performed as umbrellas that embraced pre-existing policies, harnessing their consensus while speeding up their implementation. Stressing underused or neglected facilities and areas while adding pressure on historic city centers or places inevitably intersected heritage policy – which typically progresses and adapts at a much slower pace and – in all cases, brought more reflectiveness regarding the values of the built environment and the intangible cultural assets in the process.

The case of the Pafos 2017 ECoC demonstrates how a small town of just 35,000 residents used its existing context to the advantage of the event. With a neglected historic city core, the event presented a stimulus to regenerate its urban fabric, spur social cohesion and steer development towards more sustainable practices (Dova et al., 2021). In these ways, the city activated the event's emphasis on culture to unite the area's natural, cultural, and social assets to reimagine the city. The main decision-making body, Pafos 2017, utilized community resources to shape a plan that acknowledged rather than ignored the city's problems and built on its strengths. The city's heritage became a context to bring together and even unify disparate social groups. While the lack of a pre-existing long-

term plan or vision for the city might be perceived as a weakness, it allowed for new and high-standard plans created for the ECoC to project a shared development vision for the city's future.

The event reframed the city's smaller size as a strength in order to build a participatory framework that included all community members and focused on difference, tolerance, and inclusion. Hundreds of volunteers took an active role in shaping the contents of the ECoC events and activities with initiatives spread across the broader Pafos region, in central and peripheral locations, promoting lesser-known heritage sites (Dova et al., 2021). Beyond its well-known monuments, Pafos restored historic buildings and public spaces to create a network of cultural places that worked to redefine the character of public spaces as well as re-activate these formerly unused heritage sites and fill in these gaps in the city center. This approach recognized the potential of the existing context and these formerly overlooked heritage sites, creating a strengthened physical and socio-cultural system. A standard pro-growth approach focused on creating entirely new icons or infrastructure likely would not have had the same impact on the city over time or been as successful in bringing together different communities.

2.2. Long-term vision and spatial planning

The identification of tangible and intangible heritage and the typical ways that planners and policy makers deal with it would perhaps suggest a long-term time frame in the envisioning and planning of mega-events in such spaces. Spatial plans and development strategies of hosting cities are crucial inasmuch for the delivery of the event as their potential to intersect and coordinate with heritage places and cultural policy. As noted, there have been calls for more cautious approaches to mega-event planning for the sake of event legacy and sustainability of the facilities and places over time as large facilities needed for only a few months of events or celebration can easily become a heavy burden, from a financial and urban perspective. The typical exceptions made to land-use regulation and planning procedures that allow the sped-up construction of facilities and infrastructures for the event can be seen as problematic as they bypass institutional veto points and restrictions (Basso, 2017). Such restrictions however serve not only to protect heritage itself, but also to enrich city plans and projects through the viewpoints of multiple political stakeholders. This aspect is crucial to heritage matters, both in terms of presenting opportunities as well as threats and rather than merely working around the issue through mega-plans can become a key moment to develop more coherent and aligned long-term approaches.

A clear vision and steady political commitment can bring new energies and opportunities to previously unrecognized heritage spaces, particularly those beyond historic city cores, to create synergy between urban transformations and post-event programming. Even positive additions to the cultural and leisure offering of a city brought by mega-events can unintentionally induce congestion, trickle-down gentrification effects and unwanted consequences at multiple scales when not carefully aligned with long-term plans. Despite the issue of legacy being a keyword in the discussion and preparation for mega-events, throughout consideration for the full range of effects is too often lacking. Legacy should not be restricted to just the physical infrastructure and facilities built but inclusive also of the programs, initiatives, and even the governance structures especially developed for a mega-event. Too often such aspects are overlooked and abruptly ended or lost following the close of events which results in the significant loss of institutional learning and capacity built up over years. Such post-event uncertainties can present ongoing threats to heritage as spaces that were either renewed or given new uses for the event are not continued over the long term.

One of the clearest examples of using a cultural mega-event to establish long-term visions and plans is the Genoa 2004 ECoC. The polycentric and declining city of Genoa was perceived to lack a real core that could attract tourism. Despite some efforts in the early 1990s to develop high visible attractors such as a new aquarium did not have the hoped-for long-term effects on the city. A key missing element was the lack of integration within wider plans or visions (Jones, 2021). However, the 1999 Strategic Conference and subsequent Operative Plan for the Historic Centre (2000) were the key planning documents that established a new strategic direction for Genoa. These plans focused on the 2004 ECoC, which set a clear deadline, affording event and city planners the opportunity to include the rich and extensive, but largely neglected, historic urban landscape. Many of the plans centered on substantial renovation projects which were, however, interconnected through new access points (e.g.

train station) and improved pedestrian access throughout the historic city center to help to ensure the attractiveness and long-term viability of existing heritage spaces.

The Operative Plan specified the division of projects among different planning documents, powers, and funding structures as a range of sources combined to meet all the goals and tasks. These included the local PUC (Urban Plan of the City); the regional POI (Program of Organic Intervention) plans; the 2001 G8 funding; university plans; the EU Urban I and II schemes; the national/ regional-funded CdQ (Neighborhood Contract); the nationally funded CIV (Integrated Center Streets); the PRU (Urban Redevelopment Program) and PRUSST (Urban Redevelopment Program and Sustainable Development of the Territory) initiatives for sustainable urban redevelopment, focusing heavily on the historic center (Jones, 2020; Jones, 2021). Thanks to this strategic approach, the city managed to unify these multiple funding sources and projects to execute a single, shared vision for the city's heritage and future. Such a unified approach ensured proved far more effective than a disconnected or unaligned one.

Heritage works were completed on some of the most important Rolli Palaces in the city, restoring the exterior painted facades, many of which were not previously visible or were severely darkened. Completing these works connected with the refurbishment of vital public spaces helped present a new Genoa unseen in the past century. No such urban restoration project had ever taken place before. More than 160 heritage restoration/conservation projects underpinned the ECoC success. The pedestrianization of several key city streets helped facilitate resident and visitor movement throughout the historic center while also ensuring the longevity of the many completed restoration works by significantly reducing pollution. Overall, such a vast investment and comprehensive approach to the city's heritage would have otherwise been quite unlikely without the presence of the ECoC. Perhaps one shortcoming to the city's approach is that much of the capacity building that had occurred during the years of preparation was lost as established networks were disbanded following the event (Jones, 2021). While it served as a powerful engine to establish a far-reaching heritage-based urban regeneration program, it was difficult to maintain this approach and vision in the absence of a mega-event.

2.3. Governance and local capacity building

Mega-events do not come in off-the-shelf plans nor can they be simply placed in heritage-rich cities where there may be a complex interaction of differing heritage spaces governed by an array of stakeholders. Heritage-related actors and agencies may be able to veto actions or plans that slow or even stop projects. Local perceptions and positive inclinations towards hosting mega-events have become more and more important in the awarding of events to ensure widespread support for event delivery. Involving a broad political consensus and bottom-up mobilization can be vital for both mega-event planning/implementation and its connection with heritage preservation.

The observed dynamics of event participation often imply a surge during the earliest stages of bidding/planning followed by a sometimes dramatic drop when operative decisions must be taken to keep the pace and deliver key elements under heightened time pressures. Yet such processes can become problematic if local actors feel excluded during certain phases, ultimately reducing support for and reception of the event over time. In the analyzed cases, participation was not evenly spread throughout the process but varied over time, characterized by a strong start and systematic decline throughout. In many cases the event presented a first opportunity for cities to experiment with broader engagement and participation in practice. However, spreading out such processes more evenly could help to not only mobilize citizens but also build consensus from the bid, through the event and even to sustain it through the legacy phase. One tactic to support long-term participation has been the use of small and micro grants that involve small organizations and individuals towards the goals of the ECoC through a grassroots approach. This approach enhanced the meaning and uses of places with cultural, civic and social relevance, activating and even regenerating them in connection with the event and expanding its legacy and long-term effects (Sanetra-Szeliga et al., 2020).

Usually at a larger scale than cultural mega-events, the Expo typically has very little interaction with existing urban fabric and the heritage areas of cities. However, the case of the Milan 2015 Expo, in large part due to its extensive governance, sought out ways to involve the existing city fabric and public spaces through an additional cultural

program, ExpoinCittà. The election of a new Mayor in June 2011 ended much conflict that had significantly delayed the planning and management of the Expo 2015 and led to the necessary acceleration of the project's implementation (Di Vita, 2021). To kickstart progress and ensure cooperation across city and event actors, the City Operations Master Program was launched and was inspired by the City Operations Master Program which Turin had used for the 2006 Winter Olympic Games as required by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Even though it was not explicitly required by the BIE, the international body in charge of the Expo, the Milan Municipal Administration approved this document to ensure that its multi-sector activities aligned with those being developed by the Expo 2015 agency and other public administrations to maintain consistency across planning practices.

The governance of the expo and post-expo periods was highly complex and involved both dedicated event and post-event institutions (Expo 2015 agency and Arexpo Spa) alongside several public and private actors. This complexity in part derived from the previous lack of planning vision and limited spatial coordination during the conflict ridden 2008-2011 period. This led to powers being granted to the Expo 2015 agency to bypass standard public works management rules meaning that the Expo site and related transport infrastructure were planned and coordinated primarily in a top-down manner (Di Vita, 2021). The complementary city cultural programs were in fact developed through the participation of multiple public and private actors, using the ExpoinCittà web platform as a means of matching supply and demand.

The local heritage management body, the *Soprintendenza*, cooperated effectively with the Milan Municipal Administration by increasing the joint inter-institutional committee's activities with weekly meetings to ensure a greater integration of plans and projects. Such close cooperation ensured that the cultural program in no way put the city's heritage at risk. Additionally, the Soprintendenza intentionally did not modify its standard procedures or bypass existing protocols to treat the Expo and ExpoinCittà program the same way as other annual events spread throughout the city, ensuring the inclusion but also protection of heritage sites. For example, the Expo Gate pavilions at Castello Sforzesco and the ephemeral installations for other Expo 2015 collateral events were only approved temporarily in order to test innovative solutions and verify their wider effects. Overall, this experience projected a dynamic image of the city which was possible thanks to the complex and cooperative governance involved in approving and monitoring thousands of temporary and ephemeral events held in historic spaces and structures. This approach strengthened cooperation across heritage and event actors and institutions for other new and existing events like Fashion Week and Design Week in the years following the Expo. In this way the city anticipated potential conflicts in the use of heritage places and generated positive effects in terms of the public administration's long-term capacity. A more isolated or introverted governance structure would have likely not had such wide reaching or long-term effect.

2.4. Heritage, identity and local communities

Modifying the balance and the consolidated uses and meanings attached to heritage can generate frictions or ignite conflict between different groups in reference to certain heritage pieces, historic places or the cultural practices and intangible values attached to them. Such conflicts should first be anticipated and then addressed through cultural activities, events, and the arts by creatively generating new platforms for dialogue. The active use of arts and playful events for mobilizing heritage and activating historic places contributed to new and more attractive narratives of a city and community in several of the cases that were studied. In these instances, the ECoC allowed for a collective processing of difficult and dissonant cultural heritage by recognizing specific heritage buildings and places pertaining to multiple communities and identities of the past and of the present.

Promoting social dialogue about and through heritage is, over the long term, much cheaper and less time consuming than managing conflicts that may derive from a different or more intense use of heritage and historic places. This provides the opportunity to recognize and promote other aspects of less recognized heritage, initiating new conversations and narratives. Mega-event communication typically requires the promotion of one strong narrative or image for the city and program. However, this simplified or limiting promotion may clash with the multiple interests and perspectives of actors and stakeholders as well as the transformation of the city in general,

limiting the rich interpretations of heritage and places. Rediscovering and reclaiming heritage can become a great opportunity for mobilizing and including different strata and groups of the local and regional population. Several of the cases demonstrated how expanding cultural ownership and the range of heritage narratives promoted through mega-events can be strategic also for inclusivity.

The case of the Wrocław 2016 ECoC illustrates the potential to use mega-events to address difficult or dissonant heritage and involve multiple communities. Wrocław is the largest European city to undergo a 100% population exchange as a result of the 1945 Potsdam Conference. This led to an experience of a 50-year effort to develop the ‘Polishness’ of the city while at the same time working to reduce or even to forget the hundreds of years of previous Bohemian, Habsburg and German history (Sanetra-Szeliga, 2021). The previous communist-era approach that depended upon national and class-related differences was finally abandoned in the 1990s as a more complex local cultural heritage was finally embraced. Yet the process did not take place overnight and the work of changing long-held attitudes towards local heritage would take more time. This new way of thinking presented challenges as it meant evolving from the heritage of a former “enemy” and “foreign” city to that of neighbor and treating the city as one’s own by recognizing its universal cultural values. It is within this ongoing longer-term process that the 2016 ECoC developed its slogan “Wrocław – the meeting point”.

The initial bid book took the first steps at identifying some of these underlying issues and making it a key aspect of the eventual ECoC. Several projects were developed to address this theme like the *Pojednanie / Versöhnung* exhibition that looked at the relations between the Catholic Church and Polish-German relations after 1945 and the still-unfinished process of Polish-German reconciliation (Sanetra-Szeliga, 2021). Beyond just hosting a series of exhibitions, the ECoC also provided an opportunity to involve local residents in facing their own past and were supported in these efforts with the microGRANTS scheme that provided individuals, artists and local NGOs with financial and organizational support to carry out small cultural events or projects across the city. Nearly 10% of the projects supported addressed issues relating to under-recognized heritage and aimed at renewing interest in and the memory of important buildings or places. While such processes can be quite challenging and hold the potential for much conflict, the context of the event provided the opportunity for greater involvement and inclusion that had previously not taken place, resulting in a much richer tapestry of heritage understanding.

3. The relevance of heritage issues for the new approaches to planning future mega-events

The themes presented in this article derive from the in-depth study of the five cases studied by the authors and the HOMEE research colleagues and the observed opportunities and threats. Given the availability of dozens of other cities and differing contexts, we intend the four themes to be a starting point to build from and to spark debates with experts and policy makers to contribute to more accurate and useful principles and guidelines for mega-events in heritage rich cities in Europe and beyond. The issues discussed here, for us, have a relevance beyond ‘heritage-rich’ cities or historic spaces alone. While the article focuses on particular effects mega-events have on heritage spaces, the presence of heritage can impact the planning and locating of events in a much broader sense and may even help to identify the heritage potential of places and cities not yet recognized as such.

These issues at stake are important for European cities and communities and, without doubt, worth deepening as the lessons learned can benefit future cities hosting mega-events in Europe and beyond. In our view, the issues’ relevance goes beyond just cultural mega-events as upcoming Olympic host cities are organizing very different kinds of games compared to those of the past. The Paris 2024 Summer Olympics proposes to host 95% of events in existing or temporary venues, including several prominent historic sites, such as the Grand Palais, the Palace of Versailles and around the base of the Eiffel Tower (Paris 2024, 2018; Gravari-Barbas, 2021). Meanwhile, the Milan Cortina 2026 Winter Olympics will use sites like the central Duomo square in Milan, the ancient Roman Theater in Verona as well as impact the landscape heritage values of the Dolomites area as settings (Milano Cortina 2026, 2019). Rather than platforms separated from the city, cities and organizers will be dealing with the historic urban landscape in the center of Paris for the 2024 Games or the spread-out regional landscape of the Alpine region

surrounding Cortina and the other Olympic clusters in 2026. Though encompassing a wider range of heritage concerns beyond just the urban ones, organizers must take heritage issues into consideration as demonstrated here, both for the success of the event itself and the legacy's benefit. The four key themes identified in the study of cultural mega-events are broad enough that they can readily apply to these types of mega-events and the emerging approach to the Olympic Games.

There is the potential for such plans to link with existing visions and national strategies, envisioning a legacy that relies more on mobilizing existing heritage and the intangible memory of the events rather than leftover tangible infrastructure. The governance of the Olympics are typically quite stringent, but the creation of more space may be necessary to help heritage experts make better decisions regarding the use of heritage sites. The involvement of local communities and the promotion of multiple heritage narratives have not traditionally figured in the Olympic Games, but they may be important aspects in these new planning models that will be embedded in the places where local people live and work. Across these four themes, a key element for future organizers to keep in mind is the need to consider and plan for them early within the planning process. Otherwise, they risk being ineffective or arriving too late in the process to be useful. The development of Cultural Olympiads that accompany the Olympic Games also presents an opportunity for a transfer of learning between cultural and sport events. In our view, research should explore in greater detail how these two types of mega-events interact with one another as they are often studied in isolation. As sport and other types of mega-events continue to evolve in the near future, it will be increasingly critical to expand current planning and governance processes to incorporate these wider considerations that until now have often been overlooked or considered irrelevant.

Finally, the impending novel approaches to implementing mega-events are not the only new forces affecting the planning and delivery of mega events as the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has already delayed the two largest mega events in 2020, the Olympic Games and the Universal Expo. While the future of large events remains uncertain, new public health restrictions will surely change the delivery and experience of events along with the ways they interact with and impact the heritage of host cities. As events have begun to be organized again, they are arriving in new formulations compared to what was previously common. Events are being spread out and diffused across cities to protect public health using, in the process, spaces of cities that might have been previously underused or neglected. Events also increasingly use digital media (to the full extent, as in the Tokyo Olympics) or virtual attendance which can potentially allow for much wider inclusion and involvement. Public budgets are generally more restricted than before the pandemic, requiring event organizers to rely more heavily on existing spaces, venues and infrastructures – increasing the departure from the heavy reliance on the new creation of such elements in the past. These trends align with growing calls for mega-events to reduce infrastructure costs and become ever more sustainable.

Further research will need to study such issues to continue preparing cities for the potential range of impacts that mega events of all types can have. While the future of mega and other large-scale events remains uncertain, we are confident that events will return to cities following the pandemic, though perhaps with new formats and policies. For heritage-rich cities, these four key areas will continue to be important aspects for city decision makers and heritage experts to address, from the earliest bidding phases through the long-term legacy of events.

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