

Los Angeles 2028 (7331 words, exclusive of bibliography)

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Abstract

Los Angeles has a special relationship with the Olympics, having previously hosted in 1932 and 1984. Each time, the city introduced lasting innovations on how the Games were planned and deployed. The upcoming edition in 2028 promises similar historic changes. Framed in the context of the processes of Olympic reform, this chapter presents a forecast for the 2028 Games, details the preparations within Los Angeles, and explores three emblematic sites of contestation linked to hosting.

Introduction

Los Angeles has a long and storied Olympic history, paired with an equally long tradition of influencing how the Olympic Games are planned and deployed. Having hosted in 1932 and 1984, and both times bestowing significant innovations on the institution of the Games, Los Angeles is one of the world's quintessential Olympic cities. But it is not the only one. It was therefore with some excitement that observers noted the competition for hosting the XXXIII Olympiad in 2024 came down to two cities with established Olympic credentials: Paris and Los Angeles. This contest emerged after the withdrawal of candidate cities Rome, Budapest, and Hamburg, due to economic hardship, weak political support, and popular protest and referenda (MacAloon 2016; Maennig 2019). Faced with a credibility and hosting crisis (Lauermaun 2022), the International Olympic Committee (IOC) shrewdly awarded hosting rights to both cities at the same time, granting 2024 to Paris and 2028 to Los Angeles (International Olympic Committee 2018b). This was an unprecedented move, and required a special Executive Board proposal, an Extraordinary Session, a series of discussions and promises between the candidate cities and the IOC, a tripartite agreement between all parties, and finally ratification and voting at the 131st IOC Session in Lima, Peru, on 13 September 2017.

Even before this decision, however, there were already historic changes made to the processes of bidding and hosting due to the ongoing reforms known as Olympic Agenda 2020 (International Olympic Committee 2014). One of the goals of Agenda 2020 was to better align the Olympics with the long-term plans of the host city, with a focus on increasing sustainability and lowering costs. Agenda 2020 was soon joined by a series of other Olympic reform packages, all of which affected the preparations for Los Angeles 2028. In the context of these widespread reforms, this chapter presents a forecast for the upcoming XXXIV Olympiad in Los Angeles. It includes an overview of the Games hosted by Los Angeles in 1932 and 1984, including the innovations they introduced and the controversies they engendered.

The chapter then explores in more detail the awarding of the 2028 Games, as well as the implications of Olympic reform on hosting. Finally, the chapter details the preparations for 2028 and unpacks three emblematic sites of contestation tied to the Games.

A City Shaping and Shaped by the Olympics

It is impossible to discuss the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles without first examining the context of nearly a century of Olympic history and influence in the city. Similarly, it is impossible to understand the modern Olympics without investigating the profound influence of the Los Angeles Games in 1932 and 1984. In both instances, Los Angeles was seen as “saving” the Olympic movement from widespread political problems and fiscal catastrophe; and, both times, Los Angeles was the only bidder (Dyreson and Llewellyn 2008). Both events also left their mark on the city: a number of iconic stadiums, a major thoroughfare that sweeps across the city from east to west renamed as Olympic Boulevard, and to this day a variety of Olympic logos emblazoned in unexpected spots, from benches to buildings. Even the city’s world-famous palm trees were said to be planted for the 1932 Games, though this could be an Olympic myth and instead may be the result of a massive unemployment relief program (Masters 2011). Regardless, the profound influence of the 1932 and 1984 Olympics can still be felt as the city gears up to host for a third time, and there are striking parallels between all events (Kassens Noor 2020).

The preparations for 1932 took place in the context of the global political strife that would lead to the Second World War, as well as the economic calamity of the Great Depression. People protested the folly of hosting a sporting celebration while so many suffered and starved, picketing the state capital under the slogan “Groceries Not Games,” and even throwing rocks through store windows that advertised the Olympics (Siegel 2020). These challenges led many observers to doubt that the Games would occur at all, but the dismal mood began to dispel as the Olympics approached and the festival and fantasy atmosphere got underway (Henry and Henry Yeomans 1984).

Los Angeles 1932 also heralded a number of innovations and important changes for both event and city. Notably, these Games brought to fruition the longstanding plans for a *Cité Olympique* to house the athletes for the duration of the Games (Sainsbury 2017). This first proper Olympic Village was sited in Baldwin Hills, and founded on the ideals of bringing together athletes from disparate nations to find common ground in sportsmanship and shared humanity (Xth Olympiade Committee of the Games of Los Angeles 1933, 233–35). The Village was built as temporary infrastructure, with the individual bungalows disassembled and put up for sale after the Games. This clever marketing strategy capitalized on a red-hot market for anything associated with the elite athletes and the Hollywood glamour of the 1932 Olympics. It also allowed the athletes to be housed in the Village at a modest and affordable price, since organizers could balance the books after the event, and contributed to the image of Los Angeles as a fiscally responsible host.

In many respects, the Olympic Village came to symbolize Los Angeles 1932 itself: a heady mixture of Hollywood stardom mixed with frictionless services for elite international athletes, all of whom were interacting freely without regard to race or creed. This is a powerful image and it has not yet exhausted its fuel, even nearly a century later. But in many respects, it is also at least partly fiction. Despite fairytale reports in the press on the Village's harmonious mixing, there are important exclusions and oversights to note. For example, women athletes were forbidden entry to the Olympic Village, and instead were relegated to a distant – though luxury – hotel. Further, while commentators claimed the multicultural harmony of the Village eased the city's racial tensions, the reality was that only white spectators were allowed to attend the Games, while Black, Latino, and other minority residents could not even secure housing in many neighborhoods due to the city's racist housing covenants (Dinces 2005; Morgan 2021). Nevertheless, despite the tension between the presentation of intercultural peace within the Olympic Village and the persistent inequalities outside of it, Los Angeles 1932 commanded unprecedented soft power. It broadcast an extraordinarily attractive image of Californian and American style both around the world and to Los Angeles itself, and influenced global fashion, art, cinema, sport, and business. This image remains a powerfully seductive force, even as the tension between the imagination of Los Angeles and the reality for many residents remains salient to this day. These dynamics can be seen in the preparations for 2028.

After 1932, veterans from the organizing committee organized themselves into a booster group that agitated for the next four decades to host the Olympics again (Dyreson and Llewellyn 2008). They finally succeeded in bringing the 1984 Games back to Los Angeles, though once again the city was the only bidder due to a spate of crises ranging from the terrorist attacks in Munich 1972 to the financial and planning catastrophes of Montreal 1976 (Large 2012; Liao and Pitts 2006). As in 1932, many observers predicted that the 1984 Olympics would spell the end of the Games, but once again Los Angeles imbued the ailing institution with new energy and direction, and inspired cities around the world to host once more (Dyreson 2015). Similar to its predecessor, this version of the Los Angeles Olympics was associated with significant innovations but also took place at the interface of Hollywood fantasy and a harsher reality for many residents.

Los Angeles 1984 is most famous for introducing the age of modern Olympic commercialism, producing a Games that was lean, efficient, and financially successful for the private organizing committee, boasting a \$232.5 million surplus, excluding security costs (Llewellyn, Gleaves, and Wilson 2015). Peter Ueberroth, President of the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee (LAOOC), is credited with managing a Games that emphasized existing infrastructures and strictly-controlled expenditures, while maximizing revenues from broadcasting and sponsorship (Wenn 2015). The surplus from the Games was plowed into the LA84 Foundation, which provided significant funds for constructing and improving nearly 100

sports facilities in the subsequent decades (Wilson 2015). At the same time, the event was marked by social and political controversies, some of which persist to this day in the city and indeed shape the production of LA28.

At the geopolitical scale, the Games were the site of a proxy Cold War, due to the famous boycott by the Soviet Union (D'Agati 2013). Nationally, Los Angeles 1984 represented a triumph of neoliberal political-economic functioning, and further strengthened Ronald Reagan's hold on the American imagination (Gruneau and Neubauer 2012). And domestically, the city was once again split between an image of Hollywood perfection and a reality for many residents that was much less romantic. On one end of this spectrum was a presentation of modernity, unity, celebration, and style that even included a man flying on a jetpack in the opening ceremonies (Sanders 2013).¹ On the other, Olympic organizers reneged on contracts with minority business owners that promised them exclusive licensing rights; the businesspeople later filed suit a multimillion dollar suit against LAOOC for excluding them from selling at the Games (Reich 1985). Further, LA84 featured the nation's largest peacetime security operation, with thousands of militarized troops patrolling the city and monitoring the population with brand-new surveillance and security equipment, most of which remained with the Los Angeles Police Department and contributed to the continuing exclusionary policing processes that make up this paradigmatic carceral city (Davis 2011). With sweeps to keep the homeless population out of sight of the world's television cameras, and the persistent spatial and economic exclusion of the city's non-white residents, LA84 exhibited the same mix of local inequalities hidden beneath a seductive and picture-perfect fantasy. This dynamic is fundamental to understanding the preparations for LA28, particularly within the context of the Olympic reforms that attempt to mitigate deleterious outcomes within the host city.

Olympic Reform

Overall, there are multiple common and well-documented problems related to hosting the Olympics and other mega-events (see Alm et al. 2016; Flyvbjerg, Budzier, and Lunn 2021; Müller 2015). In the aftermath of a string of Olympic-related scandals and controversies, numerous potential host cities withdrew their bids for both Summer and Winter Olympics (Lauermann and Vogelpohl 2017; MacAloon 2016; Maennig 2019). This gave rise to the wave of Olympic reforms that aim to restructure the ways in which the Games are bid for, planned, and deployed.

These are ambitious and wholesale organizational reforms, launched by the IOC with Agenda 2020 (International Olympic Committee 2014) and its partners, The New Norm (International Olympic Committee 2018) and most recently, Agenda 2020+5 (International Olympic Committee 2021). The scope of these reforms is too great to cover here, but insofar as they pertain to this chapter and Los Angeles 2028, the most important aspect to note is the effort to change the relationships between the IOC and the host city, and the implications this has

had on the preparations so far. One of the fundamental aspects of the reforms is an attempt to lower the costs and risks of bidding for and staging the Olympics by better aligning the needs of the Games with the city's development agenda. Although organizers in previous host cities such as Barcelona and Rio de Janeiro employed discourses of using the Olympics to serve their pre-existing development agendas, the recent reforms provide more concrete avenues for actually doing so. One result is the reformed event requirements, which foreground flexibility and optimization in favor of local organizing committees. Whereas previous Games imposed strict demands on the hosts, now – as a matter of policy – the Games endeavor to adapt to the city. This represents a power shift away from the IOC and towards local organizing committees, though there is debate about how effective this has been in producing better outcomes (Wolfe 2022). Nevertheless, one of the ways in which this shift is most visible is the requirement to maximize the usage of existing infrastructures rather than building anew. Of all the Olympic reforms, this aspect has had the most profound implications on the preparations for Los Angeles 2028.

Bidding and Hosting: Legitimation and Opposition

Since Los Angeles already possesses the necessary infrastructures to host, the legitimation for bidding and hosting cannot be tied to local urban development agendas, as in many other pre-reform Olympics. Instead, the LA24 candidature files were framed very much in terms of what the city can do for the institution of the Games, rather than the other way around. Under the tagline “Follow the Sun,” the Los Angeles bidders presented a lean Olympics on the platform of existing sporting infrastructure that would simultaneously deliver the highest quality experience for athletes while also “refreshing the Olympic brand around the world for a new generation” (LA24 Bid Committee 2017a, 1). The bidders offered the next iteration of the LA Olympics as a low-risk choice, a dynamic and exciting host city but with no surprises (LA24 Bid Committee 2017c, 2). Further, the bidders proudly presented California as a nexus for technology, entertainment, and youth culture, and touted their ability to promote the Olympics to new audiences via new technologies. Contextualizing their bid with the successes of 1932 and 1984, the bidders presented Los Angeles as the ideal choice to shepherd the reformed Olympics into a new era.

The candidature files also featured a narrative of strong local support for the Olympics, presented as a legacy from previous hosting successes. According to bidders, this history explains the 88% support among the local public, as well as the full support of city, state, and federal governments (LA24 Bid Committee 2017c, 3). But in terms of what the Games might actually do for the city, bidders were rather vague. Locally, bidders promised that hosting would inspire healthy living and increase social cohesion, a promise that can be traced back to the discourses of unity in the 1932 Games. They also promised a number of environmental restoration projects within and adjacent to the four clusters of venues (LA24 Bid Committee 2017c, 66). Nationally, the Olympics were promised to enhance national unity while increasing youth participation in sport. These short local and national selling points were

more platitude than promise, and little more on them was said within the candidature files, much less after the bid was won. Instead, much of the space in the bid books dedicated to legitimation discussed how hosting would leverage Los Angeles' unique storytelling powers to launch the newly-reformed Olympics into a sustainable and profitable future. Given recent Olympic scandals, it was indeed a compelling idea to organize a safe but exciting Games in Los Angeles, especially on the landscape of existing infrastructures. The LA24 bid committee presented themselves as just what the Olympic movement needed: an oasis of love for the Games, with a demonstrated record of leaving the institution on more stable ground than before.

There was no official campaign against the Olympics in Los Angeles while the bid books were being written and submitted, in contrast to Boston, where a dedicated opposition movement derailed that city's bid (Andranovich and Burbank 2021). As plans for the Los Angeles Olympics percolated into the public sphere, 30 community and political organizations formed the NOlympics LA coalition in May 2017 (Boykoff 2020). These groups worked on diverse issues such as housing and gentrification, homelessness, policing and racial justice, transit, and environmental justice. What bound them together was the notion that hosting would exacerbate the existing problems facing the city and distract from urban priorities, an argument they used to tie local issues into a multi-pronged critique of the Olympics both in Los Angeles and overall (NOlympics LA 2017). These concerns and critiques were largely dismissed by the City Council, however, which voted to authorize the Host City Contract in August 2017, a month before the IOC officially selected Los Angeles to hold the 2028 Games.

Venues

As a global city, Los Angeles already possesses more than enough venues to host top-tier sporting and cultural events, while the city's grand Olympic history buttresses their claim that they can host again without undue disruption. This became particularly relevant after the public referendum that canceled Boston's bid and thrust Los Angeles into the spotlight of the United States' Olympic ambitions (Andranovich and Burbank 2021). In this context, it was not unrealistic when Los Angeles organizers promised that all venues were either already existing, under construction, or planned for temporary overlays, and thereby fulfill the requirements of the Olympic reforms (LA24 Bid Committee 2017a, 10). The IOC Evaluation Commission calculated that 97% of venues were already in place and rated the bid very highly, particularly due to inventory of facilities and the proven history of usage after 1932 and 1984 (International Olympic Committee 2017, 20).

The venues themselves are grouped into four general clusters whose locations are determined by the presence of pre-existing infrastructures, and span the length and breadth of the enormous Los Angeles County (see Figure 1). These clusters range from the Valley Sports Park in the north (oriented around the Sepulveda Basin Sports Complex), all the way to the Long Beach Sports Park in the south (sited on the famous Pacific Ocean beachfront and

including the Belmont Veterans Memorial Pier). In between these poles is the South Bay Sports Park (sited at the Dignity Health Sports Park) and the Downtown Sports Park (an area spanning 2.5 miles that features the storied Memorial Coliseum and numerous facilities at the University of Southern California and in Downtown LA). In addition, the Games will feature an Olympic Village at University of California Los Angeles, as well as a variety of ancillary venues scattered throughout the county, ranging from Santa Monica Beach on the west to the distant Lake Perris on the east.

The geographic footprint of the LA28 Olympics is gigantic. From the north cluster to the south cluster is a distance of 69km (42mi), while from west to east is 140km (87mi), or 71km (44mi) if excluding faraway Lake Perris. Within this footprint, the impacts of hosting vary dramatically. A full nine cities in Los Angeles County will host Olympic venues, but many more will be traversed by athletes, officials, and spectators due to the dispersed geography of the Games and the emphasis on existing infrastructures.²

The commitment to fulfilling the goals of Olympic reform and using existing venues – while laudable – brings up problems of attribution, already a challenge for mega-events research (Vanwysberghe 2015). Because the venues are already existing or already planned and under construction, it is not a simple matter to determine whether a given intervention or impact is due to the Olympics or not. Indeed, there are a number of interventions that are linked with the 2028 Olympics, even though they do not appear on the organizing committee's budgets. Further, these interventions have had significant impacts on local populations, though there is debate over the extent to which the Olympics are implicated in these processes.

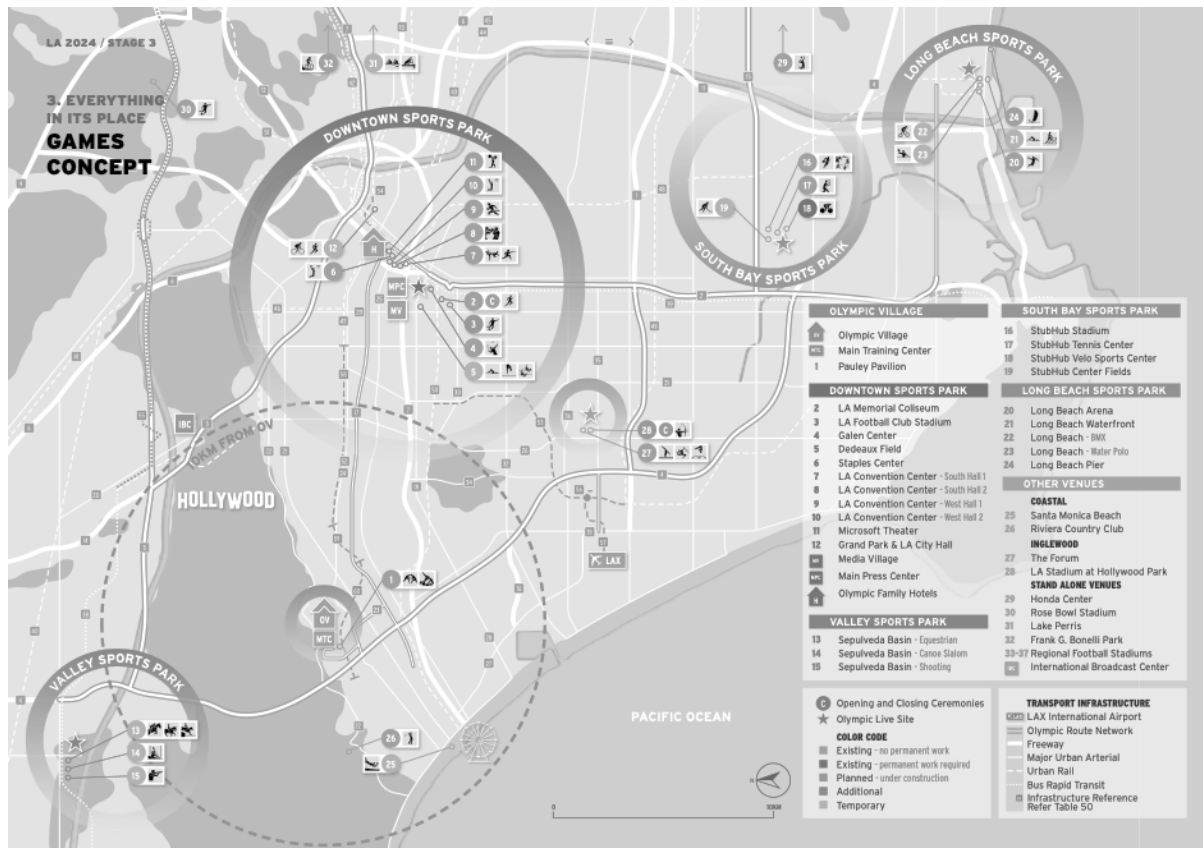


Figure 1: Venue map from original LA24 bid, showing the venues clustered into four Sports Parks. Source: LA2024 Bid Committee

Inglewood

One of these cases is mentioned briefly in the IOC's bid evaluation report, LA City, which rated the LA bid highly for its attention to existing infrastructures and stated that 97% of venues were already existing or would be temporary overlays. They noted that only one new venue would be constructed, but this was said to be planned irrespective of hosting. Listed as "LA Stadium at Hollywood Park," this single new venue is sited in Inglewood, not far from LAX Airport. Inglewood is one of the cities in LA County that stands to be most impacted by the 2028 Olympics.

Inglewood is a city of just over 100,000 residents, 50% of whom are Latinx and 41% of whom are black (United States Census Bureau 2021). Following the loosening of racial housing restrictions and white flight in the late 1960s and 1970s, Inglewood became a majority-black city that loomed large in the cultural imaginary of black Los Angeles. Like other black enclaves to its east, Inglewood experienced significant disinvestment in the late twentieth century. Nonetheless, it acquired the moniker "City of Champions" as a result of hosting the Lakers (basketball) and Kings (ice hockey) teams in its Forum arena from 1967 to 1999. Since the early 2010s, it has undergone a period of intense reinvestment, focused on reinvigorating its status as a site for sports and entertainment consumption. The Madison Square Garden Company poured \$100 million into renovating the Forum and reopened it as a dedicated live

music venue in January 2014 (Watt 2014). In the same month, Stan Kroenke, the owner of the Rams (a top-level American football team), purchased 60 acres in Hollywood Park, the site of a former racetrack, fueling real estate speculation in the surrounding area. Two years later, the National Football League (NFL) approved the Rams' relocation from St. Louis, Missouri, to Los Angeles, marking the first time in 22 years that LA would have its own NFL team. Construction then began on what would become the world's most expensive stadium: the \$5 billion SoFi Stadium (Paris 2020). This is the 3% of Olympic venues named in the IOC's bid evaluation.

SoFi Stadium is the first of several developments planned for a 298-acre site (of which Kroenke owns a majority share): construction is also underway on a mall, close to 3,000 housing units (with no affordability requirements), and 75,000 square feet of office space (Stockbridge Capital Group 2022). SoFi was not built primarily for the Olympics, but – as one of the world's most luxurious venues – it could not possibly be ignored for the Games (see Figure 2). Indeed, the Los Angeles bidding materials touted it as a factor for why LA would make a good host, calling it “the most modern sports stadium in the world...offering state-of-the-art technology and state-of-the-art facilities” (LA24 Bid Committee 2017c, 4). Despite the fact that it was constructed independently of the Olympics, it is inextricably linked to Los Angeles 2028 and will play a central role: SoFi is slated to host Olympic archery (in a temporary site next to the stadium) and to co-host the Opening and Closing ceremonies in tandem with LA's historic Memorial Coliseum (LA28 2022). It also sits at the heart of a slew of socio-spatial inequalities on Inglewood and beyond, of which the Olympics are undeniably a part, but not officially the cause. This suggests that the issues of attribution – already complicated but now rendered more complex due to the Olympic reforms – are not necessarily possible to unpack. Instead, it may be more productive to acknowledge that the Olympics play a role, though certainly not the only one, and then to explore the local impacts tied to these developments.

As plans for a new NFL stadium in Inglewood were made public, local tenants began reporting massive rent hikes: some landlords were doubling the rent overnight; others were adding \$1,000 USD to the monthly price tag (Jennings 2019). Between 2016 and 2022, median rents on one-bedroom apartments in Inglewood increased twice as fast as rents in the rest of Los Angeles (Fleming 2022). The City of Inglewood saw the fastest rising property market in the Metro LA area (Theiss 2019). In response to these spiraling costs, local housing and social justice organizations formed a coalition called Uplift Inglewood in 2015. The coalition's campaigns have included a successful push for city-wide rent control (passed in 2019), and an unsuccessful lawsuit against the development of a second new stadium in Inglewood.



Figure 2: View of SoFi stadium across the territory's water feature. Overhead an airplane prepares to land at nearby Los Angeles International Airport. Photo: Sven Daniel Wolfe

This second stadium was sited directly across the street from SoFi Stadium. As SoFi developments commenced, the owner of the Clippers basketball team made moves to secure adjacent land – encompassing both publicly and privately held plots – to build a new basketball arena. The Uplift Inglewood coalition sued the Clippers team and the City of Inglewood on the basis that California’s Surplus Land Act mandates that affordable housing development be prioritized on public land. Ultimately the coalition lost the lawsuit but managed to push back against the original plans, which would have led to the direct displacement of residents and churches. Instead, the new downsized plan featured a smaller area for purchase and 11 plots seized by eminent domain. The city justified this seizure by stating that the new privately-owned arena would bring “substantial benefits to the local community,” citing a \$100 million community benefits package as one example (City of Inglewood 2021a). Although the Clippers arena — now called the Intuit Dome — is not yet officially part of LA 2028’s plans, it is frequently cited by local authorities as a likely Olympics venue.

It is difficult to assess the quantity of indirect displacement through rising rent prices and other exclusionary pressures tied to both new stadiums, but it is clear that these developments are having deleterious impacts on local communities. The Lennox Inglewood Tenants Union has documented continued displacement since the 2019 passage of rent control, including cases of landlords raising rents illegally or pressuring residents to move through harassment, intimidation, or neglect. Union members have argued Inglewood is witnessing the displacement of working-class black and brown residents, and the remaking of the city to serve tourists, wealthy event spectators, and the interests of capital. The

expansion of Airbnbs and other short-term rentals aimed at stadium visitors risks intensifying displacement pressures in the area, in line with research on the links between tourism and gentrification (Cocola-Gant and Gago 2021; Wachsmuth and Weisler 2018). These impacts are concentrated in the areas around the new stadiums, which ties the LA28 Olympics into these processes of development and displacement, even though the stadiums themselves are not directly the products of the Games.

Hotels and Housing

Aside from Inglewood, another area of concentrated Olympic sites is found at the University of Southern California (USC) and Exposition Park, home to the century-old Memorial Coliseum and the Banc of California Stadium. The latter opened in 2018 as the grounds of the LA Football Club, has since become home to Angel City FC as well, and is slated to host Olympics football preliminaries. The Coliseum is expected to co-host the Opening and Closing ceremonies and host track and field events. USC will host the Main Press Center, the Media Village, badminton, and swimming and diving (in a temporary venue constructed on the university's baseball field, rather than in the 1984 Olympic pool). The neighborhood is located in South Central Los Angeles just south of Downtown LA, which is in the midst of a southerly expansion. The majority-white, relatively affluent residents of new student housing complexes offer a visible contrast to the area's majority-racialized, working-class residents.

Since Los Angeles won hosting rights for 2028, at least two new hotel developments have been proposed for the streets adjacent to Exposition Park and the university. On the western perimeter of USC, a struggle is unfolding over the former site of the Bethune Library, a lot that has been vacant since 2009. For many years, community organizers have been calling for affordable housing to be built on the site, but as of the time of writing, the project slated to be approved is a Marriott hotel, notably one with media facilities that could serve the Olympics press corps. As in Inglewood, a coalition of local organizations has arisen to oppose the development plans, aiming instead to advance projects that more clearly meet residents' needs (UNIDAD 2020).

On the other side of the university, directly across from the Coliseum and LAFC stadium, city authorities approved a development project encompassing a hotel, apartment units, student housing, retail, and office space. The plan called for the displacement of residents from 32 rent-controlled apartment units. LA's City Council justified subsidizing this project by citing a need to accommodate growing tourism and the forthcoming Olympic and Paralympic Games (Alpert Reyes 2019). Once they secured city approval, however, the project developers applied to adapt the project into a student housing facility for USC, excluding hotel rooms from the plan and distancing themselves from the Olympics. Nonetheless, the Olympics were a key discursive tool in initial project approval, and served to justify the displacement of 32 families.

Homelessness

In 2018, LA's mayor, Eric Garcetti, said he was "confident by the time the Olympics come, we can end homelessness on the streets of LA," (Internet Archive 2018). At that time, the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority estimated that 31,285 people were unhoused in the City of Los Angeles, and 52,765 people across the county (Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority 2018). As of 2022, the figures have increased substantially, to 41,980 people across the city, and 69,144 people across the county (Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority 2022). Although the county claims to be housing people more rapidly than ever before (LA County 2022), rising rents are pushing people into the streets at a faster rate. The visibility of some aspects of homelessness, particularly the sight of tents occupying some sidewalk and park spaces, has made it one of the most contentious issues in Los Angeles today. Angelenos are divided over appropriate policy responses and service priorities.

Los Angeles has long had a municipal law prohibiting sleeping, sitting, or lying in public space in ways that block pedestrian access, as well as a law prohibiting sleeping or camping in public parks. A 2018 US Court of Appeals decision stated that cities could not enforce anti-camping laws if they did not have sufficient shelter beds, as is the case in Los Angeles. In July 2021, LA's City Council amended Section 41.18 of the Los Angeles Municipal Code to allow enforcement of anti-camping provisions in areas within specified radiuses of "libraries, parks, day-care centers, schools," and other locations including doorways and driveways (Zahniser and Oreskes 2021). Critics have argued these criteria encompass such large swaths of the city that the ordinance effectively criminalizes homelessness, pushing unhoused Angelenos into different neighborhoods (or into incarceration) rather than addressing systemic issues underlying homelessness (LACAN 2021).

It is in this context of a dire homelessness crisis and intensive political debate that LA is preparing to host the 2028 Olympics. The mega-events literature documents a trend of intensified criminalization of homelessness before and during the Olympic Games, and LA84 was no exception to the trend. Police ramped up patrols to stop and search unhoused residents, pressuring them out of busy tourist areas and sometimes forcibly transporting them to jail, sparking legal claims against the city; one police captain said, "we're trying to sanitize the area" (Roderick 1984). Community organizers in groups like Skid Row's Los Angeles Community Action Network (LACAN) oppose the 2028 Games in part due to their community members' experiences of criminalization and aggressive policing for LA's previous five-ring festival, as well as concerns that the upcoming Games could serve as a justification for further criminalization.

While the city and LA28's plans regarding homelessness in the build-up to and during the Olympics remain unclear, the 2022 Super Bowl – hosted in SoFi Stadium – heightened concerns. An encampment home to dozens of residents on the side of a road that connected LAX airport and SoFi Stadium was forcibly cleared three weeks before the event. The mayor

of Inglewood denied any connection between the clearance and the Super Bowl (Venegas 2022), yet residents who were forced to move reported that the workers conducting the clearance told them clearly that the action was due to the upcoming Super Bowl, directing them to move away from SoFi Stadium rather than towards it.

Clearly, the material crisis of homelessness in LA, as well as the contentious politics surrounding it, are grounded in conditions that would exist without the plans to host the Olympics in 2028. Nonetheless, hosting the Olympics may intensify the stakes, as LA faces intensified pressure to present a tourist-friendly version of “cleanliness” to the global audience. This certainly has been the case in other Olympic host cities (Kennelly and Watt 2011), and given the scope of the homeless problem in Los Angeles, it is likely LA28 will follow the same pattern.

Transit

Successful transportation during Games-time is always a crucial element for hosting (Kassens-Noor 2013a), but is particularly important in the preparations for LA28 due both to the event’s large geographic footprint, and also to the city’s famously difficult traffic problems. Indeed, Los Angeles consistently rates as one of the worst cities for traffic in the United States, featuring 11 of the nation’s 25 most congested freeway segments (Barragan 2015; Pishue 2021). Olympic travel will be impossible without using these freeways, so organizers face the challenge of ensuring timely and convenient transportation during the Games without disrupting travel for the rest of Los Angeles. In the candidature files, organizers established four overall objectives regarding transport: providing frictionless transit for the Olympic family, meaning athletes, officials, media figures, and other VIPs; transporting spectators and the Olympic workforce efficiently to their destinations; keeping the rest of Los Angeles in motion; and engaging the Games to accelerate Angelenos’ adoption of expanded public transport systems (LA24 Bid Committee 2017a, 34).

In keeping with the usage of existing venues, organizers stated that no transit investment was needed for the Olympics beyond projects already in progress. These included a \$14 billion upgrade to LA’s international airport and metro line extensions to link key Games sites including the airport, the Athletes Village at UCLA, and Downtown. Despite the lack of projects linked directly to the Games, city officials clearly endeavored to use hosting as a means to catalyze transportation developments – another longstanding strategy with mega-events worldwide (Kassens-Noor 2013b). In Los Angeles, this attempt at event-led-catalyzation was announced by Mayor Garcetti as the Twenty-Eight by ’28 initiative, a plan to accelerate and complete a set of 28 transport projects before the Games (Walker 2018). Some of these had funding secured and were already scheduled for delivery prior to 2028, while others were planned for acceleration with an additional \$26.2 billion USD beyond their initial budgets. Despite a sizeable media push at the time, this initiative appears to have been quietly abandoned in favor of more piecemeal investments. In 2021, the State of California allocated

\$1 billion USD to deliver “critical projects in time for the Olympic Games,” but did not define which projects were “critical” (State of California 2021, 183). In 2022, LA’s Metro Authority identified over 200 projects that could help support the Games and thus could merit priority funding (Uranga 2022), but many of these were potentially problematic. For instance, the list includes a \$1.4 billion automated “people mover” connecting Inglewood’s stadiums to LA’s metro system, a key piece of potential Olympics infrastructure that was not included in the bid books. This project could wind up as another mega-event-related white elephant infrastructure: projections for peak ridership were 11,450 passengers per hour from a game at SoFi Stadium, compared to 414 passengers per hour on a normal weekend or weekday (City of Inglewood 2021b, 130).

Overall, the transit preparations for LA28 are marked by rather vague and undefined promises of beneficence for local populations, but there is little doubt that organizers will provide top-notch service for athletes, dignitaries, and spectators. Los Angeles authorities already have experience limiting disruptions while managing traffic-related major events, ranging from the Super Bowl to the Oscars, and LA28 promises to build on this experience by advancing a fully integrated transport management system throughout LA County (LA24 Bid Committee 2017c, 73). During Games-time, they plan to establish a comprehensive Olympic Route Network with dedicated lanes, automatic computer-controlled GPS venue access for VIPs, and Bus Rapid Transit lines for workers and fans (LA24 Bid Committee 2017a, 34). Whether hosting will truly catalyze a public transit boom for residents is another question, however.

Decorations and Festivities

Despite its stark racial and socioeconomic inequalities, Los Angeles in many parts is a hugely photogenic city. The LA28 hosting plan is intended to highlight these advantages for ticketed spectators and residents alike. Each of the four Sports Parks is sited to provide views of some of LA’s most iconic landmarks and backdrops, such as the Hollywood Hills and Santa Monica Beach. Further, each of the Parks features more than clustered venues: within a securitized perimeter, visitors can partake in a festival atmosphere that includes food and drink, music, big screen Live Sites, and shopping (LA24 Bid Committee 2017b, 1–4). These Sports Parks will be linked by dedicated transport corridors, so that visitors technically should be able to transit between them without interfacing with the city proper.

This idea of separating the Sports Parks from the rest of the city is challenged by the placement of certain stadiums within the urban fabric, however. For example, the size of the Downtown Sports Park makes it hard to imagine that the territory could be secured, and it is not clear how quotidian urban life will continue once the Games begin, should these festival plans take place. After all, it is a distance of over two miles between the Memorial Coliseum at one end of the Park and the LA Live venue at the other, and there is a great deal of ordinary city in between. The bid books do not address this issue and organizers have so far remained silent.

In terms of communication, organizers promised to leverage the region's considerable storytelling soft power capacities in order to broadcast LA28 effectively to new audiences around the globe. The plan is to engage California's world-leading technology and social media companies to ensure global reach and engagement, thereby connecting the Olympics to new demographics via new technologies (LA24 Bid Committee 2017a, 27; 2017c, 6). Further, following the tradition of arts festivals tied to the 1932 and 1984 Games, the 2028 edition will feature a Cultural Olympiad that spans a range of leading institutions, including the Getty Museum and the California Institute of the Arts (LA24 Bid Committee 2017c, 8). The arts campaign will reach from elite institutions down to the level of individual neighborhoods, to include street art, food trucks, and music performances. Finally, come Games-time, the built environment will be coordinated under a singular decorative vision to enhance the festival atmosphere throughout the city, but particularly along the Games routes (LA24 Bid Committee 2017c, 10). As a final touch, organizers plan to create a replicable model of the Live Site plan so that any of LA County's cities could organize an Olympic-related festival of their own.

Governance and Budget

One of the aspects that distinguishes the preparations for Los Angeles 2028 is the unique style of Olympic governance. Where other mega-events have established a specific delivery organization (such as SOLIDEO in Paris 2024, Olympstroy in Sochi 2014, or the Olympic Delivery Authority in London 2012), this edition features only the private LA28 organization. This is an echo of Ueberroth's lean organizational approach, which many continue to credit for the financial surplus of 1984. LA28 boasts a wealth of government and business connections and support, ranging from some of the globe's most recognized corporations to bipartisan political support at local, state, and national levels (LA24 Bid Committee 2017b, 13).

On this background, Los Angeles organizers promised an affordable Olympics with a balanced budget, slated for \$5.32 billion USD at the time of the bid (LA24 Bid Committee 2017c, 96). This has grown to an estimated \$6.9 billion USD so far (CBS 2021). This growth trend is consistent with the economic risks faced by other host cities, as every Olympics has suffered from busted budgets to greater or lesser degrees (Flyvbjerg, Budzier, and Lunn 2021). Notably, taxpayers in both Los Angeles and the State of California will be held responsible for covering any financial shortfalls. Contractually, the city must first cover \$270 million USD of any deficit, after which State guarantees will cover another \$270 million USD. Anything over that must be paid again by Los Angeles taxpayers (Legislative Analyst's Office 2017; Smith 2021). Though city authorities made a wise financial decision in rejecting the initial proposal for a new \$1 billion USD Olympic Village (Legislative Analyst's Office 2016), LA28 still exposes residents of Los Angeles and California to financial risks.

Conclusion

Once again, for the third time in history, Los Angeles has been called to refresh and renew the Olympics. As in 1932 and 1984, the Games were awarded in a context of political and economic controversy, with Los Angeles as the sole bidder for its year (indeed, the IOC made history with its unprecedented and unanimous awarding of 2024 to Paris and 2028 to Los Angeles). This time, however, the Games will be held in the framework of the package of reforms that aim to realign the relationship between the Olympics and the host city. Among many other changes, these reforms emphasize the usage of existing infrastructures rather than building anew. On its own, this represents significant progress in relation to previous mega-events, and has the potential to reduce or even eliminate the risks of oversized and underused infrastructures geared to the event but not to the needs of the city. At the same time, this reform also brings up problems of attribution, as it is not clear to what extent the impacts of any given intervention can be tied to hosting.

Overall, the potential and the problems of 2028 should be seen in context of previous editions. 1932 helped make the Olympics a mega-event in both commercial and cultural senses, and 1984 helped revive the Games in the eyes of the world while introducing new strategies for profitable hosting. In this light, the salient question is related to a potentially new model of hosting, based on an array of existing infrastructures. Will the reformed Olympics only be granted to cities with a pre-existing portfolio of venues, and the proven capacity to fill them outside of the Games? How will bidding authorities legitimize high costs to residents in the absence of promised improvements to the built environment? What will hosting look like in the aftermath of LA28, and what could a new Los Angeles Olympic model bring to the world?

There is little doubt that Los Angeles 2028 will be spectacular, producing a slick and beautiful event on the background of the city's stunning and iconic monuments and landscapes. Sited in four Sports Parks that span a great swath of the gigantic Los Angeles County, organizers aspire once again to infuse the Games with the same Hollywood glamour and style as in 1932 and 1984. Yet, just as before, the Olympics are not arriving in a vacuum, and there is a chasm between the storied presentation of the city and the deep socio-spatial inequalities that persist in the lived city. From the growing militarization of the Los Angeles Police Department, to the relentless pressures of gentrification, to the overwhelming numbers of unhoused Angelenos, there is no lack of serious issues in the city. Many residents – particularly but not only those in affected areas – express real concern that hosting LA28 will exacerbate these problems rather than relieve them. Los Angeles will no doubt look stunning for the athletes, organizers, spectators, and the global audience. But outside of the Olympic routes and the international broadcasting services, serious questions remain about whether hosting is in the best interests of the majority of residents.

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¹ It is worth watching the jetpack entry in the 1984 opening ceremonies and remembering how truly futuristic and fantastical was this moment for so many millions of people: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yt0E-AkoM9U>

² LA County is comprised of 88 cities but the Games will traverse three counties: Los Angeles, Orange, and Riverside counties. The 2028 Los Angeles Olympics will be held in venues in the cities of Los Angeles, Santa Monica, Carson, San Dimas, Anaheim (Orange County), Pasadena, Inglewood, Perris (Lake Perris, Riverside County), and the unincorporated area known as University City.

