

INTRODUCTION

Open Access



Industrial heritage in the hosting of mega-events: assessing the potential for urban redevelopment and social change?

Florence Graezer Bideau^{1*}  and Anne-Marie Broudehoux²

Mega-events, whether sporting (Olympics, World Cup, etc.) or cultural (Exhibitions), are unique moments to study urban dynamics, especially with regard to image and identity construction (Andranovich et al. 2001; Smith 2012; Gold and Gold 2016). For cities and nations alike, mega-events represent unique opportunities to showcase the best of what they have to offer, hoping to bolster tourism and attract inward foreign investment (Grix and Lee 2013; Hayes and Karamichas 2012; Müller and Gaffney 2018). They are important drivers of the urban intervention meant to build a favourable place-image and yield positive economic returns.

Over the last few decades, critical studies have highlighted how mega-events downplay, or actively invisibilise, their negative impacts on urban dynamics, in terms of growing economic inequality, social polarisation, politics of exclusion, and resident's dispossession, leading to multiple forms of mega-events' resistance and opposition (Gruneau and Horne 2015; Sanchez and Broudehoux 2013). Some scholars (Pillay and Bass 2008) have described the resulting material and immaterial transformations in terms of social engineering, while others talk of sustainability and inclusive development goals (Broudehoux 2017; Stanton 2005, 2019). While mega-events

are not the only factors influencing local change, they do exacerbate existing trends and, as such, act as a magnifying glass to reveal with clear clarity the interests and values of local decision-makers, especially in terms of heritage preservation.

Heritage plays a major part in destination branding and attractiveness. Processes and negotiations among individual and institutional actors to identify, acknowledge, and convey a property's heritage designation are paramount, as they pertain to meanings associated with memory, identity, and space (Carter et al. 2020). In particular, built heritage is an essential element of the urban landscape, a material bearer of values and meaning. It can be a major asset, as an element of cultural offer that can attest to the city's historical rootedness and level of cultural sophistication. It can also act as a testimony to its trustworthiness as a safe location for investment and tourism.

Local states increasingly mobilise industrial heritage sites to host mega-events as a strategy to promote urban development, place branding, and societal change (Theurillat and Graezer Bideau 2022). Led by public-private coalitions of interest that remain faithful to the urban entrepreneurialism governance strategies described by Harvey a few decades ago (Harvey 1989), these endeavours impact both infrastructure and landmark development, as well as ecological and social environments. The paper by Graezer Bideau, Deng and Roux compares dominant discourses surrounding the reuse of industrial heritage in the context of mega-events. Specifically, it analyses the Shanghai 2010 World Expo and the London 2012 Summer Olympic Games. Meanwhile,

*Correspondence:

Florence Graezer Bideau
florence.graezerbideau@epfl.ch

¹ College of Humanities, Digital Humanities Institute, Heritage, Anthropology and Technologies Research Group, EPFL, CM 2 270 - Station 10, Lausanne 1015, Switzerland

² School of Design, University of Quebec at Montreal, C.P. 8888, succ. Centre-ville, Montréal, QC H3C 3P8, Canada



© The Author(s) 2024. **Open Access** This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Zhang's paper examines state-led strategies in Guangzhou, Shanghai and Beijing from 2010 to 2022.

Mega-events will, therefore, influence what and how heritage is being valued, exploited, and interpreted. As a selective process, dictated by the needs, values and aspirations of contemporary society as well as those imagined to be held by external visitors, heritage preservation can easily be instrumentalised for the purpose of the event or become a key asset in its success. The expediency with which event-related urban transformations are undertaken is often incompatible with heritage preservation, which requires lengthy and careful assessment, public consultation and negotiations over use and interpretation (Gruneau and Horne 2015; Jones 2017; Ponzini 2012).

Recent years have brought to light the sustainability aspect of heritage preservation, a dimension that mega-events have increasingly capitalised upon. The hosting of mega-events has justified the adaptive reuse and redevelopment of degraded, abandoned, or underused brownfields or industrial sites to be incorporated into the city. These interventions have the potential to maintain continuity with the area's past uses while also limiting the need for new construction, thereby favouring an approach that exploits the embedded potential of existing buildings (Elefante 2012). While it remains to be proven whether such approaches actually reduce the carbon footprint of such mega-scale events, the cultural and symbolic value of conserving part of the city's industrial past and integrating it into the urban fabric with new contemporary uses is not to be neglected. By maintaining continuity, it serves a pedagogical function and pays tribute to communities whose lives were historically tied to such sites.

The role of industrial heritage in guiding and legitimising public policies and discourse about urban development has been extensively acknowledged, especially as a way to ensure the continuity between the past, present and future (Wicke et al. 2018; Gardner 2019). However, these transformations are not evenly embraced by local population groups and can lead to debates, tensions, even conflicts, depending on socio-political context and implementation models, especially regarding socio-economic impacts and dispossession. A comparison of various contexts in which the organisation of mega-events impacts industrial heritage is crucial to better identify common trends and local variations.

This special issue of *Built Heritage* covers a range of events, including sporting mega-events, world exhibitions and European Capital of Culture, held on various forms of industrial sites, from waterfront port areas, to brownfields, canals districts, and other former industrial sites. The special issue brings together researchers from various disciplinary perspectives, from urban

design, architecture, urban studies, geography, anthropology, sociology, and humanities. The many case-studies also cover a vast geographical territory, that spans Asia (Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou), Europe (Elesfina, Pafos, Liverpool) and Latin America (Rio de Janeiro).

Articles in this special issue aimed to identify common trends in the relationships between the organisation of mega-events and the use and preservation of industrial heritage, with, of course, many local variations. These trends can be summarised in four broad categories based on the event's level of interest in industrial heritage.

1. Limited interest

This first category includes cases where mega-events make use of repurposed post-industrial sites without necessarily preserving their built heritage. This happens, for example, when there is dissonance between the industrial nature of the site and mega-events objectives, both short and long-term. In these scenarios, heritage is seen as an impediment to either the message conveyed by the event or the longer-term pursuits of economic development and project profitability. It can result in the demolition of built heritage and the large-scale, spatial reconstruction of the entire area or in the toning down of the industrial nature of the site. It often leads to both spatial and social separations between the regenerated site and its surroundings.

2. Instrumental interest

This second category is characterised by a superficial or pragmatic interest in industrial heritage, which is instrumentalised as an element of territorial branding. Built heritage is preserved as a mere theatrical prop, used as landmarks with no real commitment to conservation or recognition of heritage value. Industrial buildings and facilities are seen as stylised aesthetic objects and used as mere containers to house event-related cultural or to showcase commercial activities without paying tribute to their particular history. Due to their limited operating time and external decision-making power, major events often dictate heritage interpretation and subsequent material interventions in the service of the event itself. As a result, the rich cultural connotations and collective memories carried by industrial heritage are susceptible to oversimplification, as demonstrated in the paper of Latuf de Oliveira Sanchez analysing the urban design of the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games. The preserved elements are hollowed out of their social and historical content and thus lose all educational value. The collective memories they carry may be fragmented and marginalised, with only

certain aspects being integrated into the dominant narrative.

3. Substantial, mutual interest

In this third category, built heritage is embraced as a central aspect of the event, a positive asset, and a valued cultural artefact. This scenario puts forward the mutual benefits of both the event and its industrial setting. The event contributes to highlighting and promoting this heritage as an important asset and a rich context for future urban development. It acts as an impetus to rediscover industrial heritage and a role in activating the local agency that would ultimately defend this heritage. In this issue, the paper of Jones and Wang is representative of the specific interactions between industrial heritage and European Capitals of Culture as illustrated by the examples of 2023 Elefsina, 2017 Pafos or 2008 Liverpool. Wang's paper analyses the post-Expo evolution and renewal of Shanghai's Huangpu River industrial zone, showing the redevelopment initiatives that led to the reconfiguration of the industrial waterfront into a dynamic cultural landscape. The event can also provide opportunities to valorise and promote the intangible aspects of industrial heritage that are often overlooked. Specific industrial buildings or facilities are creatively reused, in ways that preserve their nature as tangible carriers of collective memory. In return, industrial heritage adds value to the event, not only as a green and progressive endeavour but can enrich the user experience by turning the event into an educational opportunity. It also acts as a showcase for innovative urban transformation achievements to domestic and international audiences. The paper of Broudehoux in this issue is emblematic of the importance of preserving the Valongo wharf as a site of collective pain and suffering for enhancing the memory of slavery in Rio de Janeiro.

4. Legacy interest

In this fourth category, the event itself is the main contribution to heritage with the construction of iconic buildings. The preservation of the remaining buildings is triggered by their repurposing for other functions or by their standing as historical testimonies for future generations. The legacy of mega-events seldom comprises industrial buildings except for some World Expos, like the Crystal Palace Exhibition in 1851 or the Eiffel Tower in 1889. For example, in his discussion, Honisch's paper refers to the importance of showcasing economic and cultural relevance within the first World's Fairs.

These articles reveal some of the challenges faced by host cities in balancing the complex demands of large events with those of heritage preservation while

also promoting long-term economic development. More research is required to properly assess the long-term effectiveness of the reuse of industrial heritage in terms of post-event repurpose and to address the gap between official discourse on heritage preservation and the actual level of conservation.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Plácido González Martínez for coordinating this Special Issue, the journal's editorial team, and the anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments.

Authors' contributions

Florence Graezer Bideau and Anne-Marie Broudehoux are co-authors. Both of the authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Authors' information

Florence Graezer Bideau is Senior Scientist and Senior Lecturer at the College of Humanities of the Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL), Switzerland, where she has been employed since 2009. She leads the Heritage, Anthropology and Technologies Research Group, formerly known as Heritage, Culture and the City, focusing on the role of social actors in heritage making. She received her doctoral degree in History and Civilisation from the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in Paris. Between 2015 and 2022, she was also a visiting professor at the Department of Architecture and Design, Politecnico di Torino, Italy. Contributing to the field of critical heritage studies, her work delves into the complex interplay between culture and power through a comparative perspective. Her research investigates cultural policies, heritage management and governance, dynamics of resistance, and urban and territorial development, examining these issues from both top-down and bottom-up perspectives. She has published several books and articles on interdisciplinary projects related to urban anthropology and heritage, including post-Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, UNESCO World Heritage sites, or intangible cultural heritage. Her co-edited book *Porter le temps. Mémoires urbaines d'un site horloger* (MétisPresses), received the Koos Bosma Prize by the International Planning History Society in 2022. Since 2020, she has led the SNSF project, 'Uses of cultural heritage at the Beijing Winter Olympic Games of 2022'.

Anne-Marie Broudehoux is Full Professor at the School of Design of the University of Quebec at Montreal (UQAM), where she has been employed since 2002. She holds the title of Director of the Modern architecture heritage graduate program. She received her doctoral degree in Architecture from the University of California at Berkeley. Her main research interests focus on the political economy of urban image construction, especially in the context of emerging economies hosting mega-events. She has published several books and articles about the socio-spatial transformations that preceded the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro. Her 2004 book *The Making and Selling of Post-Mao Beijing* (Routledge) received the International Planning History Society bookprize in 2006. Since 2017, her research has moved towards the memorialisation of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and the spatialisation of memorials to collective atrocities.

Funding

Funding for data collection in this project comes from a Swiss National Science Foundation Grant in Social Sciences and Humanities.

Funding for data collection in this project comes from and Insight Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Availability of data and materials

Data for this research will not be shared because it rests mainly on empirical, qualitative data and their interpretation.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

This paper was written using knowledge from a research project (Uses of Cultural Heritage at the Beijing Winter Olympic Games of 2022), which was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) at EPFL.

This paper was written using knowledge from a research project (Socio-spatial aspects of the event-city: Rio de Janeiro), which was issued an ethics certificate by the Interdisciplinary Ethics Committee for Human Subject Research (CIEREH) at the University of Quebec at Montreal.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Received: 13 August 2024 Accepted: 26 August 2024

Published online: 12 September 2024

References

- Andranovich, Greg, Matthew J. Burbank, and Charles H. Heying. 2001. Olympic cities: Lessons learned from mega-events politics. *Journal of Urban Affairs* 23 (2): 113–131. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0735-2166.00079>.
- Broudehoux, Anne-Marie. 2017. *Mega-events and urban image construction: Beijing and Rio de Janeiro*. London: Routledge.
- Carter, Thomas, David C. Harvey, Roy Jones, and Ian J. M. Robertson, eds. 2020. *Creating heritage: Unrecognised pasts and rejected futures*. London: Routledge.
- Elefante, Carl. 2012. The greenest building is... one that is already built. *Forum Journal* 27 (1): 62–72.
- Gardner, Jonathan. 2019. Recurring dreams: Mega events and traces of past futures. *Archaeology International* 22 (1): 86–99. <https://doi.org/10.5334/ai-399>.
- Gold, John R., and Margaret M. Gold. 2016. *Olympic cities, city agendas, planning, and the world's games, 1896–2020*. London: Routledge.
- Grix, Jonathan, and Donna Lee. 2013. Soft power, sports mega-events and emerging states: The lure of the politics of attraction. *Global Society* 27 (4): 521–536. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2013.827632>.
- Gruneau, Richard, and John Horne, eds. 2015. *Mega events and globalization, capital, cultures and spectacle in a changing world order*. London: Routledge.
- Harvey, David. 1989. From managerialism to entrepreneurialism: The transformation in urban governance in late capitalism. *Geografiska Annaler B* 71 (1): 3–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/04353684.1989.11879583>.
- Hayes, Graeme, and John Karamichas. 2012. *Olympic games, mega-events and civil societies. Global culture and sport*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jones, Zachary. 2017. Synergies and frictions between mega-events and local urban heritage. *Built Heritage* 1 (4):22–36. <https://doi.org/10.1186/BF03545655>.
- Müller, Martin, and Christopher Gaffney. 2018. Comparing the urban impacts of the FIFA World Cup and Olympic Games from 2010 to 2016. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 42 (4): 247–269. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723518771830>.
- Pillay, Udesch, and Orly Bass. 2008. Mega-events as a response to poverty reduction: The 2010 FIFA World Cup and its urban development implications. *Urban Forum* 19 (3): 329–346. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12132-008-9034-9>.
- Ponzini, Davide. 2012. Introduction to the special issue – cultural mega-events and heritage: Challenges for European cities. *European Planning Studies* 30:427–436. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2021.1959719>.
- Sanchez, Fernanda, and Anne-Marie Broudehoux. 2013. Mega-events and urban regeneration in Rio de Janeiro: Planning in a state of emergency. *International Journal of Urban Sustainable Development* 5 (2): 132–153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19463138.2013.839450>.
- Smith, Andrew. 2012. *Events and urban regeneration: The strategic use of events to revitalise cities*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Stanton, Cathy. 2005. Serving up culture: Heritage and its discontents at an industrial history site. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 11 (5): 415–431. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527250500337454>.
- Stanton, Cathy. 2019. Displaying the industrial: Toward a genealogy of heritage labor. *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 16 (1): 151–170.
- Theurillat, Thierry, and Florence Graezer Bideau. 2022. China's extended urbanization driven by the 'consumption city' in the context of financialized ecological civilization. *Transactions in Planning and Urban Research* 1 (1–2): 17–31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/27541223221101720>.
- Wicke, Christian, Stephan Berger, and Jana Golombek, eds. 2018. *Industrial heritage and regional identities*. London: Routledge.

Publisher's note

Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.