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EVIDENCE BRIEF
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EVIDENCE BRIEF · DESTINATIONS AND IMPACT

The Games Reshape More Than Sport

Are mega-events field-configuring projects?

The Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games drew 6,600 athletes and officials from 71 nations and sold 1.2 million tickets at a net cost of 1.86 billion Australian dollars. Studies of London 2012, Gold Coast 2018 and the 1999 Lausanne anti-doping conference show how mega-events and their meetings reshape construction, planning and the governance of sport.

By Eventamin · How we work 12 November 2026 United Kingdom, Australia, Switzerland

3 studies

mega-events | Olympic Games | London 2012 | Commonwealth Games | event legacy | temporary venues | host cities | official partners | anti-doping | World Anti-Doping Agency

Also in Industry events and markets

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KEY FINDING

Mega-events are recurring rituals for sport but one-off flagship projects for the fields around them: London 2012 changed venue strategy, construction practice and urban regeneration. Who gains depends on contracts and partnerships, and an event owner whose legitimacy is in question can lose control of its own conference.

Three studies, 2015–2024

Key findings

- **The Games reshape fields beyond sport.** London 2012 was a recurring ritual for sport but a one-off flagship project for event policy, construction and urban regeneration[1].
- **Temporary venues cut the risk of white elephants.** Only six of London's 36 competition venues were new permanent buildings, and its temporary built area was 2.5 times Sydney's and four times that of Athens and Beijing[1].
- **Construction practice changed.** London's public funding package of 9.3 billion British pounds included a 30 percent contingency, and 98 percent of demolition material was reused or recycled against a 90 percent target[1].
- **Partners decide what counts as legacy.** At the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games, seven official partners negotiated a shared legacy list, while small businesses and community groups stayed outside[2].
- **Legitimacy beats control of the room.** At the 1999 Lausanne anti-doping conference, the IOC hosted the event and limited ministers to five minutes each, but governments' staged consensus forced an independent agency, the path to WADA[3].

FOR THE MARKET

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Market outcomes

What the studies mean for each part of the industry.

Venues & destinations	Host cities limit the risk of unused venues with temporary structures, existing facilities and post-event land use planned with the region; London built only six new permanent competition venues, although symbolism still drove a costly stadium rebuild.
Organisers & associations	An event owner's control over the venue, the agenda and speaking time does not protect its position when its legitimacy is in question; coalitions that coordinate before the event can set the outcome.
Exhibitors & sponsors	Official partner status decides whose legacy claims are heard; on the Gold Coast, suppliers needed contracts with the federation and the organizing committee to take part, and non-partners lobbied for a foot in the door.

Mega-events as projects

Mega-events are among the largest projects a city undertakes. The Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games, the first held in a regional city, brought 6,600 athletes and officials from 71 nations to 18 venues, sold 1.2 million tickets and reached an estimated broadcast audience of 1.5 billion, at a net cost of 1.86 billion Australian dollars[2]. Questions about legacy and cost remain pressing; Victoria withdrew from hosting the 2026 Games[2].

Preparation starts long before the event. Bid documents for the Olympics are written at least ten years ahead, followed by around seven years of preparation for a few weeks of competition[1]. Studies of London 2012, Gold Coast 2018 and the conference that led to the World Anti-Doping Agency show how such events reshape the fields around them.

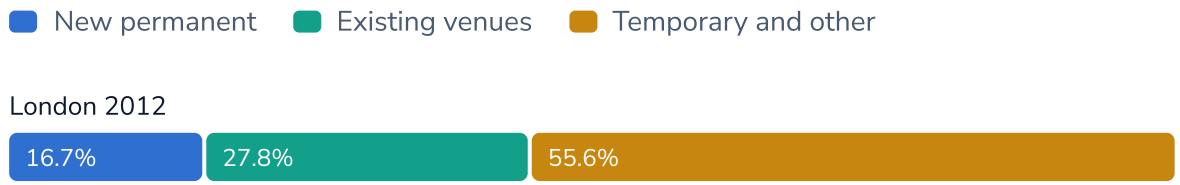
London 2012 beyond sport

For sport, the Olympics are a recurring tournament ritual; for the fields involved in hosting, preparing and leaving a legacy, they are a singular flagship project, and their global media exposure creates reputational effects across all of them[1]. London 2012 changed three fields in particular[1].

Fear of white elephants shaped the venue strategy. Only six of 36 competition venues were new permanent buildings and about 10 were existing venues, and London's temporary built area was 2.5 times Sydney's and four times that of Athens and Beijing[1]. The stadium was designed to shrink from 80,000 to 25,000 seats after the Games, but was later rebuilt for a Premier League football club, as symbolism overrode the plan; London's venue experts became sought-after advisers for later hosts[1].

Competition venues of the London 2012 Olympic Games, by type

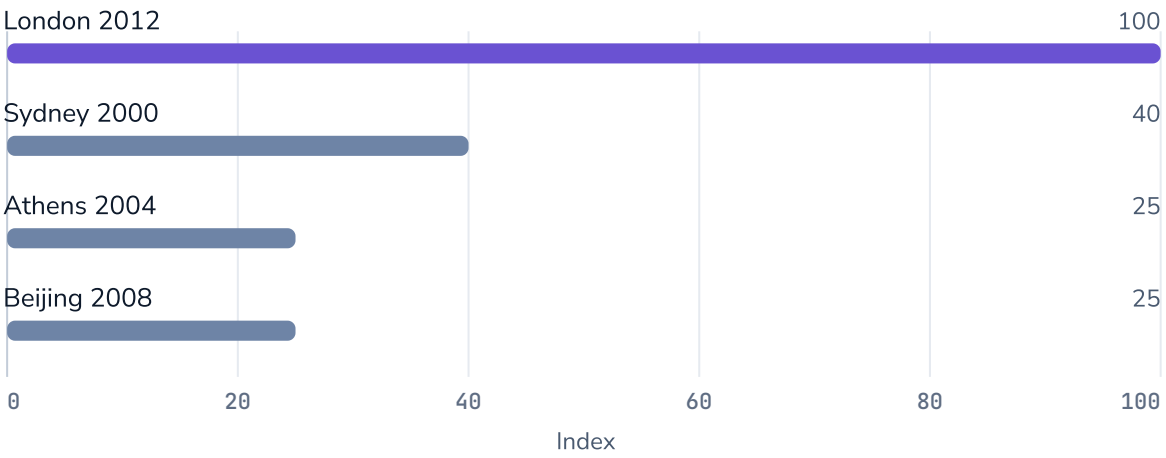
Approximate share of 36 competition venues.



Source: Thiel & Grabher · Release date: 2015 · Region: United Kingdom (London) · Venues: 36

Temporary built area at selected Summer Olympic Games compared with London 2012

Index: London 2012 = 100.



Source: Thiel & Grabher · Release date: 2015 · Region: Worldwide

Construction and regeneration

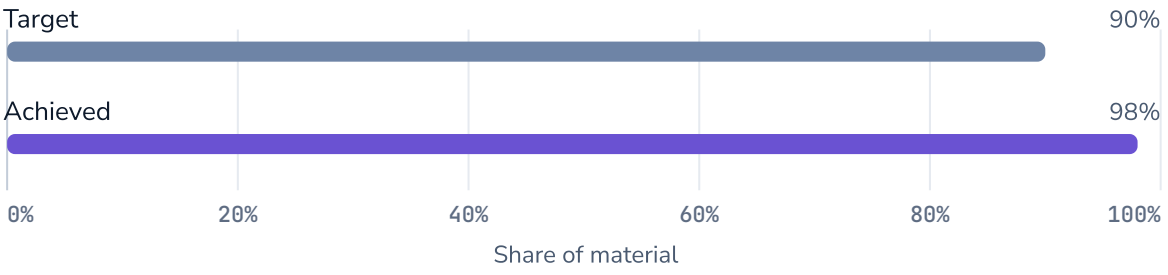
The program advanced the modernization of the UK construction industry. The public sector funding package of 9.3 billion British pounds included a 30 percent contingency, three lines of assurance and time buffers in the schedule, and contracts encouraged collaboration; procurement criteria covered health and safety, sustainability, employment and skills[1]. 98 percent of demolition and site-clearance material was reused or recycled, against a target of 90 percent[1].

The gains went mainly to those directly involved. Lessons were codified on a learning legacy platform, but in the difficult market after 2008, Olympic contractors kept their position and spillover to other firms was limited[1]. In urban regeneration, a state-centered approach linking the park to regional plans and neighboring communities sought to avoid the isolation of earlier projects; its success will show only over decades[1].

FIELD	MAIN ISSUE BEFORE THE GAMES	WHAT CHANGED
Mega-event policy	Unused venues after the event [1]	Explicit legacy strategies and temporary venues; London planners hired as consultants [1]
Mega-project construction	Cost overruns and failure of large projects [1]	Risk management, cost control and collaborative contracts [1]
Urban regeneration	Property-led, narrowly local projects [1]	Public commitment and integration with regional plans [1]

Reuse and recycling of demolition and site-clearance material for the London 2012 Olympic Park

Share of material.



Source: Thiel & Grabher, citing program reports · Release date: 2015 · Region: United Kingdom (London)

Who gets a seat on the bus: Gold Coast 2018

Contracts and legislation drew the boundaries of the Gold Coast Games. The Commonwealth Games Federation had no authority of its own in Australia, so its rules bound every affiliated entity, including suppliers and sponsors, to the host city contract, and host legislation protected the Games' symbols against ambush marketing and street vending [2]. Suppliers had to contract with the federation and the organizing committee to take part, and an exclusive agreement with one university shut out others [2].

The city's legacy coordination covered only official partners. Seven official partners, among them a casino, a university, a vocational college, a watchmaker, a telecom operator, an IT firm and a supermarket chain, negotiated one shared legacy list, while small businesses and community groups lobbied from outside; some reported legacies predated the Games or did not outlast them[2].

When the event owner loses the room: Lausanne 1999

A conference can shift power within a field. In February 1999, the IOC convened 580 participants from sport federations, athletes, national committees, governments, the pharmaceutical industry and sponsors at its Lausanne headquarters, and proposed an anti-doping agency under its own control[3]. It limited ministers to five minutes each and controlled who could speak[3].

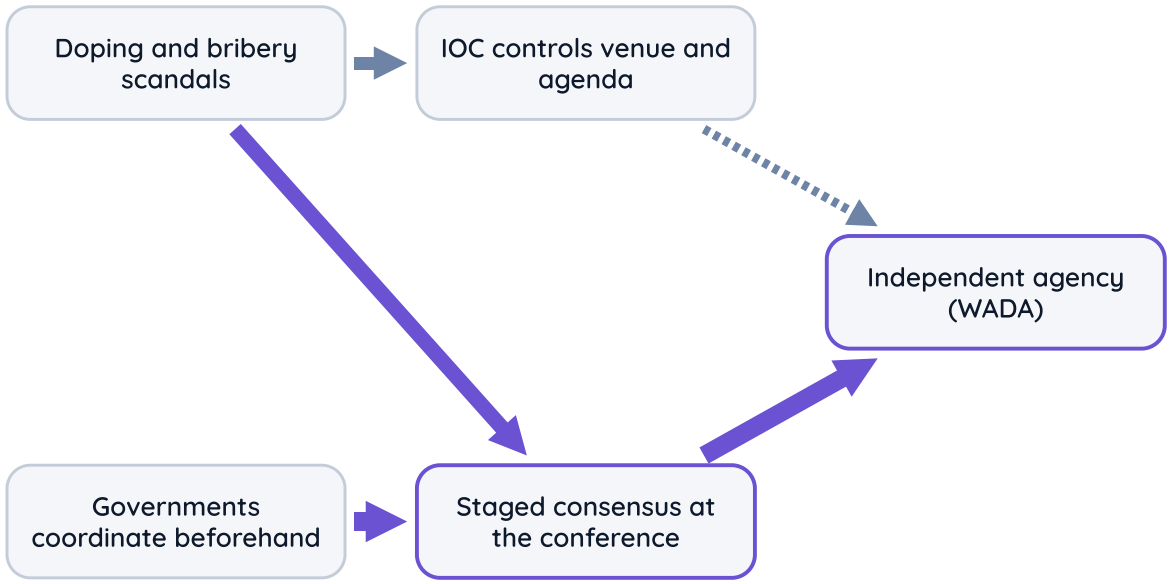
Its legitimacy had been damaged by the 1998 Tour de France doping affair and the Salt Lake City bribery scandal[3]. Governments from the U.S., Canada and the 15 EU states had coordinated beforehand and spoke in sequence for an independent agency, and the IOC revised the declaration at the last minute, setting the course for the World Anti-Doping Agency[3]. FIFA and cycling's world body resisted mandatory two-year suspensions together and won an exception clause[3].

How the 1999 Lausanne conference led to an independent anti-doping agency

Main sequence of events; line width shows the main route, not a measured value.

Main route Other links

Arrow width marks the main route, not a measured value · dashed: weak or no link



Source: Read et al. · Release date: 2023 · Region: Switzerland (Lausanne) · Data: 624 newspaper articles and archive documents · Classification: Eventamin

Notes on the data

The figures are based on three studies published between 2015 and 2024: 34 interviews and documents on the London 2012 construction program, 32 interviews, observation at planning events and 27 documents on the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games, and 624 newspaper articles and archive documents on the 1999 Lausanne conference[1–3]. Venue shares are approximate, calculated from the reported counts; the remainder after new permanent and existing venues is shown as temporary and other venues. The index of temporary built area is derived from the reported ratios. The sequence of the Lausanne conference is Eventamin's coding of the study's findings.

Sources

● Study ○ Industry source

1 Thiel, J., & Grabher, G. (2015). Crossing boundaries: Exploring the London Olympics 2012 as a field-configuring event [Journal article]. *Industry and Innovation, 22(3), 229–249*. https://doi.org/10.1080/13662716.2015.1033841 First-hand

2 Bakos, A., O'Brien, D., & Gowthorp, L. (2024). Field configuration around a major sport event: Boundary work and implications for perpetuation of "the legacy rhetoric" [Journal article]. *Event Management, 28(3), 335–349*. https://doi.org/10.3727/152599524X17046754077325 First-hand

3 Read, D., Skinner, J., Lock, D., & Houlihan, B. (2023). Field-configuring events as temporary sites for institutional change in sport: a case study of the Lausanne conference on anti-doping [Journal article]. *European Sport Management Quarterly, 23(1), 227–249*. https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2020.1845763 First-hand

The evidence

●●● 3 studies

SAMPLE

Three studies: 34 interviews on the London 2012 construction program, 32 interviews and observation around the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games, and 624 newspaper articles and archives on the 1999 Lausanne conference

YEARS

2015–2024

METHOD

Single case studies based on interviews, observation, documents and press coverage

About Eventamin

Eventamin reads the peer-reviewed research on events, exhibitions and hospitality, sets it against industry data and states what it means for the market. Every brief is published by Eventamin as an organisation: its sources, method and corrections are open.

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