Atlanta’s Olympic Infrastructural Legacy: An Examination Approaching the 20th Anniversary of the Games

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Introduction
Hosting a mega-event like the Olympics can be the catalyst that many host cities need to encourage infrastructural revitalization efforts. The desire to maintain or create a positive global image justifies large-scale infrastructural redevelopment projects meant to please residents and visitors alike, as well as put the newly modern city on display to outsiders (Andranovich, Burbank, & Heying, 2001). Ideally, this large-scale investment will pay dividends that will leave a positive lasting legacy for the host city (Essex & Chalkley, 1998). The impacts of such investments can be observed in a diverse range of areas that include: improved transportation infrastructure, new and updated sports facilities, and even state-of-the-art telecommunications networks (French & Disher, 1997; Goldberg, 1995; Hayes & Baumgartner, 1996). These infrastructural improvements are very tangible and can have long-lasting impacts that remain present long after the Olympic Games have moved on. For example, new living complexes and parks are still helpful to host cities once the visitors leave. It is important to note that the concept of legacy, by definition, extends to many different aspects of the Olympic Games, but for the purpose of this project it will only refer to the sport and urban aspects of legacy as they relate to the physical infrastructure of the Atlanta Olympic Games according to the legacy themes as set forth by Leopkey and Parent (2011).

In Atlanta, host city for the 1996 Summer Olympic Games, this desire to improve itself was central. At a time when the city was rising in the international spotlight, the chance to host the Olympic Games provided the opportunity that Atlanta needed to revitalize existing infrastructure and neighborhoods (Rutheiser, 1997). In 1990, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) awarded the rights to host the centennial Olympic Games to Atlanta. The Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG) successfully hosted the event while building new sports facilities and infrastructure for city and metropolitan area (Glanton, 2009). Significant investments were made into existing infrastructure as well as new facilities in and around Atlanta using private funds. Notable infrastructural improvements included the building of the Olympic Village, the Centennial Olympic Stadium (now Turner Field), the Georgia Tech Aquatic Center, as well as the Olympic Park in downtown Atlanta (French & Disher, 2007). What remains to be researched is what the significance of those improvements and their current conditions mean to the long-term legacy of the Atlanta Olympic Games now that the 20th anniversary of the event is approaching.

Purpose and Objectives
The primary purpose of this research project is to examine the infrastructural legacy of the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games on the City of Atlanta considering that the Games are now approaching their 20th anniversary. By examining the infrastructural investments made for the Games one can better understand 1) what has happened to those infrastructure upgrades in the years since the 1996 Olympic Games; 2) how have they benefitted urban development in Atlanta; and 3) what the current state of those infrastructural upgrades mean for the long term legacy of the Games themselves and the City of Atlanta.

Methods
A case study is the preferred method of analysis here as it allows for in-depth study of this one particular event (Miles & Huberman, 2014; Yin, 2014). Using this approach, the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games and its infrastructural legacy were focused upon. Archival documents, including newspaper articles, bid and planning documents, final reports, and official government documents were used to build the first part of the case. Data was analyzed using Atlas.ti to highlight emergent themes in relation to the infrastructural legacy of the event.

Results
When the Games finished there were many stakeholders who benefited from the infrastructural improvements. To
name a few: the Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech) received a new aquatic center and dormitories; Centennial Olympic Stadium was converted to a baseball stadium for the Atlanta Braves; and the Olympic Park helped to revitalize a blighted area of downtown Atlanta (French & Disher, 2007; Lohr, 2011). These infrastructure investments as well as others not mentioned were immediately helpful for the communities they impacted; however, not all of the venues are currently being maintained in good condition. Some facilities are being vacated (e.g. the Braves moving to Cobb County) as they approach obsolescence and others being left in a state of disrepair due to underuse (Arsenault, 2014; ESPN.com, 2013; Lohr, 2011). The Olympic Park in downtown Atlanta is perhaps the most successfully maintained infrastructural legacy from the Games as it remains popular and has changed the urban landscape around it via increased redevelopment of a once unremarkable neighborhood. With its Olympic Ring fountain, it is perhaps the most omnipresent reminder of the Games occurrence (Arsenault, 2014). Despite the successes of the Park and at Georgia Tech, it would seem that several of the venues used in the Atlanta Games have lost their Olympic luster. Thus, the disrepair and planned vacation of those facilities. While these venues might still be a part of the legacy of the Games according to the definition from Leopkey and Parent, they are not a desirable legacy to maintain and therefore do impact the image of the event negatively (2011).

Other infrastructural legacy impacts from the Atlanta Olympic Games will be further explored in the poster presentation. It is clear that the infrastructure of the Games is one of the most pervasive legacies that may be left behind. With proper planning for post-Olympic usage, venues and other physical legacies can incredibly beneficial to communities, but without such planning they may become undesirable white elephants.