

SPORT / ITALY

Beating the Olympic odds

The Olympic Games have always given a podium to host cities to flex their soft-power muscles for a global audience but a history of overspending and legacy failures has taken the shine off the glory. Why does Milan-Cortina think that its 2026 Winter Games can buck the trend and not break the bank?

WRITER *David Plesanti* ILLUSTRATOR *Francesco Ciccolèlla*

Last June the International Olympic Committee (IOC) delivered its decision on which city would host the 2026 Winter Olympic Games: a joint bid from Milan and Cortina d'Ampezzo, a mountain resort a five-hour drive from the capital of Lombardy. At the announcement event in Lausanne, as the Italians hugged, kissed and cheered, Swedish runners-up from Stockholm-Åre sat stony-faced. But such displays of sporting rivalry by potential host Olympic cities are increasingly rare. Indeed, Stockholm-Åre was Milan-Cortina's only competitor for the 2026 crown; for the 2024 Summer Games, the winner Paris's sole competition came from Los Angeles.

“[Previous host] cities have seen costs spiral out of control,” says Ugo Arrigo, associate professor of political economy and public finance at Milan's Bicocca university. “With few obvious benefits, the result has been the frequent withdrawal of bids or cities not bothering to try in the first place.” Summer hosts from recent years, such as Athens (2004) and Rio de Janeiro (2016), call to mind exorbitant overspending and images of neglected stadiums and algae-green swimming pools. Meanwhile, the price tag for the winter event in Russia's Sochi (2014) – a staggering \$51bn (£4.6bn) – is enough to put off any aspiring candidate. According to the *Oxford Olympics Study* (published in 2016 by the Saïd Business School, University of Oxford) every Olympics from 1960–2016 was over budget, with the average cost overrun being 156 per cent. Economic blowouts are seemingly inevitable.

The general consensus is that in the 21st century, the branding and soft-power potential that an Olympics can bring to a city aren't enough to overcome the financial burden. So why would Giuseppe Sala, the flamboyant mayor of Milan who could be seen leaping up and down at that IOC announcement in Lausanne, be so happy that his hometown will co-host in 2026? And what does Italy stand to gain?

For starters, the country is looking to drastically reduce costs for this Games to prevent it from becoming an economic drain. “In reality we are not looking at a huge event with massive costs,” says Andrea Giuricin, a transport and infrastructure consultant based in Milan. “Milan-Cortina 2026 can be called ‘Winter Olympics Light,’” he says. In its bid, Italy's central government stated that it would invest a minimum of €200m in the Games – a remarkably small sum. Part of the reason why costs can be kept low (in theory) is that existing infrastructure is being relied upon. A Brescia-Verona-Padova high-speed rail link, which will play a crucial role in shuttling crowds across the region, is already being built and many facilities for the sporting events in Cortina have been in use for years.

Giuricin cautions that success can only be expected if the Games are “well managed”, with one major concern being delays – commonplace in Italy. But he adds that both Lombardy and Veneto stand to gain a lot if they're able to pull off a successful event: he predicts a

POLICY / GLOBAL

One world, one vision

Forget GDP, it's time to rank countries on the good they put out into the world.

WRITER *Simon Anholt*

Give me 30 seconds and I can list 30 huge problems that humanity is facing in 2020, from climate change to pandemics, via poverty, inequality, conflict, slavery, terrorism and much else besides. The frustrating thing is that we know the solutions to most of these but countries won't collaborate enough to implement them: governments still see their task as competitive rather than co-operative, much as they did 300 years ago when the nation-state emerged.

We and our governments need to start seeing countries as part of a system because no nation or bloc is powerful enough to tackle these challenges alone: the US can't fix economic instability; China can't fix the climate crisis; Europe can't fix migration.

A good first step might be to stop ranking countries solely by their competitiveness. In 2014 I launched the Good Country Index, which ranks nations according to the impact that they have on the



€3bn injection into the two hosting regions due to, among other things, an increase in tourism via city breaks to Milan and winter sports holidays. After London's 2012 Summer Games, the UK government issued a legacy-impact report in which it stated that the capital stood to receive £41bn (£4.8bn) in investment by 2020. With no follow-up report it's hard to put an exact figure on the post-Olympic growth of London but, whatever the number, Stratford and much of east London has visibly transformed over the past eight years.

There's more to the Olympics than dollars and cents, though. As the world's most prestigious sporting event, it ensures that for two weeks all eyes are on the host city. In Italy the Olympics and other mega global galas tend to be looked upon particularly favourably. The three turns the nation has had as Olympic host are remembered fondly: in 1956 Cortina welcomed audiences with its Alpine charm; Rome's 1960 Summer Games evokes the so-called Economic Miracle of the 1950s and 1960s; and, in 2006, Turin was transformed from a state of industrial decline into a cultural destination.

Perhaps a more important recent example of how staging an international event can bolster an Italian city is Milan's 2015 World Expo. This is widely cited by the Milanese as a turning point for their city; the expo spurred an unprecedented proliferation of land development and cultural activity, turning the Lombard capital from a drab commercial centre into a thriving metropolis. What's more, the CEO of the expo was none other than Sala, Milan's current mayor. “Expo 2015 was a bigger event than even the Summer Olympic Games,” says Giuricin, citing the 20 million people who visited over the course of six months. “It makes total sense for somewhere like Milan to host the Winter Olympics.”

With its ever-changing skyline, booming economy, calendar of fashion weeks and the Salone del Mobile design fair, the city knows how to welcome guests from around the world. But while there's little doubt it's well-equipped to play host, some are questioning whether Milan and Cortina really need the Olympics. “Traditionally, Olympic Games are more useful to cities that are under-developed as they do have the effect of speeding things up,” says Arrigo. Nevertheless, he concedes that a northern Italian Winter Olympics is a sensible choice: on a clear winter's day, the jagged snowcapped Alps make an impressive backdrop to Milan's urban landscape and it's only a 30 to 45 minute drive to the pistes from other large northern Italian cities, such as Turin, Bergamo, Verona and Brescia. By contrast, says Arrigo, “Norway, Sweden and Canada do not have big centres of population near the mountains.” The 2026 runner-up Åre has a population of 1,400 and is more than 600km (at least seven hours by car) from Stockholm.

While Milan might be thriving, the city still stands to make further gains. It is a global fashion, luxury and design capital but an Olympics could hammer home its reputation as a modern, efficient and sporting city too – provided everything goes to plan.

About the writer: Plesanti is MONOCLE's Rome correspondent. Architecture and design stories are his speciality; he is often found aboard a Frecciarossa high-speed train and keenly follows the latest transport and infrastructure stories in the region.

global culture, security, health, climate, the rule of law and more. Much of the data comes from the UN system and other agencies.

Finland came first in last year's edition (one of these days somebody should really try and make an index in which a Nordic country doesn't come top). Unexpectedly (or perhaps not), the US and Russia were nearly tied at 40th and 41st place, like two mean kids holding hands at the edge of the playground, refusing to play with everyone else.

It's an interesting result but on the whole there are no signs of improvement since 2014. The predominant culture of governance is still “America first”, “Russia first”, “Britain first”. In a way that's fine: of course, if you're elected to run a country, that country should be your

top priority. But what I find depressing about this stance is the implication that if one country comes first, all the others have to come last.

It doesn't have to be this way. In my job as policy adviser to the governments of more than 50 countries over the past 20 years, I've been able to prove time and again that collaborating imaginatively with other countries is much more than a compromise: it stimulates fresh thinking and ends up producing better policies. Incidentally, it also enhances your country's image, which is very good for trade, tourism, foreign investment and diplomatic relations.

The Good Country Index is a small step but, by showing which countries are contributing to the future of humanity and which ones are just free-riders in the international community, I hope it's helping steer the debate in the right direction. Since the index was launched, I've never had so many arguments with strangers in my life. But at least we're now debating the right thing: instead of quibbling about how well individual countries are doing, at last we're working out how much they're doing for the rest of the world. And that feels like progress.

About the writer: Anholt's forthcoming book *The Good Country Equation*, out in August, explains how to fix our world.

TECHNOLOGY / GLOBAL

Bye-bye black mirror

Smartphones have become our default – always there, always helpful, always distracting. Hang up on instant connection and rediscover a less hectic life with more time to think.

WRITER *Matthias Woolsey*

One year ago, I ditched my smartphone, trading it in for a 1990s Nokia that cost £5 (€6). Given my technology and e-commerce background, it was a shock to those who knew me; having started my career as a developer and animator, I ended up as the managing director of online luxury retailer Net-a-Porter. There I managed a company with nearly 2,000 employees on several continents. But whenever I took a step back, I realised that, although we were extraordinarily busy, it never felt like we were accomplishing much. I wouldn't say this sense of underachievement stemmed from my smartphone but it was certainly exacerbated by it.

With smartphones, you spend almost all of your time feeling very busy because you're either sending an email or listening to something and scrolling through Instagram. When you take them out of the equation, you remove the need to respond to things instantly. You can't fire off a reactive email; more importantly it might be several hours before you have the chance to read one. Things become clearer. When I made the decision to leave



Net-a-Porter in 2019, I started thinking about the things that give me energy during a day versus the things that used it up. Ultimately, I decided to get rid of my iPhone.

I felt that I had been losing clarity and creativity because I was always trying to optimise my time with the help of my smartphone. We think that these devices make us more efficient because they create the sense that we are always accessible, engaged and working. But in many ways, my phone was making me less thoughtful as I was living life through a screen.

The first few months were a bit chaotic but having no smartphone has completely changed the composition of my day. Apple estimates that we unlock our phones about 80 times a day, probably spending at least a few minutes on it every time. That's about five hours a day on the thing. With that extra time I'm able to let my mind go.

I've rediscovered my ability to let my thoughts wander and have a quiet mind not plagued by anxiety. I've learned to navigate the city without a map (if I do get lost I just ask for directions). I've found that my creativity and thought processes have improved. I have time to read books that wouldn't previously have made it into my rotation. I can accomplish much more going for a 30-minute walk, thinking, than doing two hours of emails. It's like we believe that these things are opposed: working and efficiency versus thinking and having free time and thought. But they're related. Getting rid of my smartphone has shown me that.

About the writer: Woolsey is global president for 66 North, a 95-year-old Icelandic technical-outerwear company.



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POLITICS / GLOBAL

Here's hoping

The new decade starts in a sorry state but look at the buffoonery of Trump and Johnson in the right light and optimism isn't the folly it first appears.

WRITER *Andrew Mueller*

It is traditional to be optimistic at the beginning of a new year; even more so at the start of a new decade. But, at the beginning of 2020, observing this custom might seem an act of complacent perversity.

The decade we have just escaped has bequeathed a burden that mitigates against much spring in the step. Across the western democratic world that won the great ideological contest of the late 20th century, institutions of state and bastions of reason appear to be crumbling amid a siege by querulous legions of wreckers, headbangers and yahoos.

Any optimism about 2020, or indeed the 2020s, might therefore sound something like a passenger aboard the sinking *Titanic* frantically reassuring themselves that the water won't be too cold. But there *are* reasons to be cheerful.

Most obviously, 2020 is the year in which US voters will have the chance to think again about Donald Trump. It would be foolish to take for granted that they will; if, by November, Trump can still pitch a robust economy and lack of stupid wars, he will take some beating. Nevertheless, Trump teetered along a narrow path to victory in 2016, delivered to the White House ultimately by just 80,000 voters across Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin – all states winnable by a plausible Democrat candidate (indeed, all states won twice by

US democracy than any president since John F Kennedy urged his fellow citizens to ask not what their country could do for them but what they could do for their country.

What was significant about the thumping that Trump's Republican party received at the 2018 midterm elections was not its scale (spectacular though it was) but the identity of those doing the thumping. Women and members of various minorities ran – and won – in record numbers, many acknowledging that they had been roused to action by their president's noxiousness. Trumpism might well be recalled as the desperate death-rattle of paranoid nativism.

It is harder to see the bright side for the UK. For a while it looked as though we might be spared the demented folly of Brexit by the astonishing incompetence of its advocates. December's general election has ended the argument for the foreseeable future. The UK will leave the EU and it will do so under the leadership of someone whose prime ministerial ambitions were, not so long ago, regarded as a colossal joke.

It is not, however, impossible to be optimistic. Boris Johnson's opportunism, coupled with the size of the parliamentary majority he now commands, might permit him to shunt the UK towards a softer Brexit. He has no principled interest in anything but his own advancement and reputation – and, as such, will not

Trump might have done more to energise US democracy than any president since John F Kennedy urged his fellow citizens to ask not what their country could do for them but what they could do for their country



Barack Obama). Everything that went right for Trump in 2016 has to go right again in 2020 – and nothing can go wrong.

This is to say nothing of what might come to be remembered as the Trump Effect. We have witnessed a revival of liberalism and civic engagement in response to Trump, whose obvious corruption and buffoonery reminds citizens of democracies that their institutions and ideals will not uphold themselves. Entirely inadvertent on Trump's behalf, it is doubtless the last thing he would have wanted – other, perhaps, than the collected novels of Toni Morrison. But the truth is that he might have done more to energise

want his time in Downing Street to be defined by riots over toilet paper. Johnson's vanquishing of cranky Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn was hopefully also reinvigorated the UK's serious, reformist centre-left, marginalised these past few years as Labour's members threw a self-indulgent, puritanical tantrum.

Even if it turns out that being optimistic about the US and the UK was, well, optimistic, there might still be something useful to be salvaged from the wreckage: a reminder to everyone else that the norms and conventions of our democracies still require our protection.

Happy new year – and happy new decade.

About the writer: Mueller is a contributing editor at MONOCLE and also presents Monocle 24's *The Foreign Desk*, among other programmes. He was wrong about Trump winning the presidency but remains optimistic enough to believe he's right this time.

MUSEUMS / GLOBAL

Displays and displacement

Museums improve urban spaces – we must ensure that their soft power isn't used as a force for gentrification.

WRITER *Gail Lord*

There is a story, probably apocryphal, that the park in Joni Mitchell's song “Big Yellow Taxi” (1970) is located in his neighbourhood: Yorkville, Toronto. The Riverboat Coffee House where Mitchell famously sang that song was on Yorkville Avenue, around the corner from my house. And the nearby carpark – “They paved paradise and put up a parking lot” – was built on top of a park in 1950. There's a museum angle to “Big Yellow Taxi” too: “They took all the trees, And put 'em in a tree museum, And they charged the people, A dollar and a half to see 'em.” As a museum planner, this negativity about museums – right on my street – ranked me. As if there are too many museums with nothing better to put in them than dead trees. But is there any merit to this: could there be such a thing as museum overload?

Today there are somewhere between 50,000 and 80,000 museums in the world, depending on how you count them and what you count. There have been two main museum-building booms: the first, in the global north and west, occurred between 1780 and 1900, stimulated by nation-building and colonialism as royal collections were transformed into national museums. The second, which started in 1980 and is still going, is fuelled by urbanisation and rising urban real-estate values worldwide; in 2008 we became majority urban dwellers for the first time in history as the number of people living in cities surpassed 50 per cent.

The economic shift from an industrial economy to a knowledge- and service-based one promotes values such as education, knowledge-creation and innovation – all of which are recorded, shared and, in many ways,



stimulated by museums. So you will find trees in natural-history museums alongside artefacts of migration, human development, art and war. With increasing social tensions, museums are becoming safe places to discuss “unsafe” ideas: studies in the US, Canada and elsewhere have identified the fact that the public has significant trust in museums due to the perception that these institutions are sources of objective information.

The current museum-building boom is moving east; China, for example, is seeking to achieve the level of public access to museums that westerners enjoy. In 2013 it set a target of having one museum per 250,000 people, which meant building museums at a rate approaching one per day. The US, meanwhile, has as many as one museum per 10,000 people and the UK one per 26,000 residents. We can expect to see more museum growth throughout the cities of the global east and south.

The growth of cities and dense urban living brings requirements for improved public space and amenities such as parks, playgrounds, socially oriented buildings (including health facilities, libraries and museums) and tourist destinations. The subsequent presence of a museum or public library has the effect of hiking up nearby property values; museums and cultural facilities are used to make new developments more attractive, especially in these days of declining retail. So while on the surface it seems that more museums means more social good, the gentrification to which these institutions can contribute results in neighbourhoods often becoming too expensive for long-term inhabitants. There might be more museums but not for those who need them most.

There are a range of planning tools and incentives being put in place by cities to accommodate longtime residents and retain the authenticity of neighbourhoods, combating gentrification and displacement. What can museums do? They need to be aware of their impact on community, which means working closely with residents and developers to improve living, working and learning conditions. It's typical these days for companies to have corporate-social-responsibility programmes. Perhaps it's time for museums to develop similar schemes. Otherwise they run the risk of becoming irrelevant, out-of-touch spaces (much like Mitchell's tree museum).

About the writer: Lord is president of Lord Cultural Resources, the global cultural-planning firm. Her books include *Cities, Museums and Soft Power*.

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And there'll be creators and investors singing the praises of drone fighters and human-cost savings. Amid all of this chatter about automated weaponry and a new robotic arms race, it's likely that most commentators and policy-makers will miss the cultural conflict that's glaring them in the face.

As much as we might fret about AI-enhanced armies going rogue, it would be useful to think about the daily conflicts being caused by all the “intelligent” devices in our midst – there's an urgent need to resolve the complete lack of digital decency. CEOs have made much about their journeys of digital transformation but I've yet to see a company take a leading role in setting standards for how society should behave with phones, tablets, cameras and other bits of technology that people have bought.

Is it not somewhat odd that a Panasonic shaver comes with more safety instructions than a smartphone? My apartment building has a set of house rules that encourage residents to abide by certain codes but the same can't be said for my laptop. And what about how devices should be used in private or semi-public environments? Airline CEOs love to talk up their digitisation but who's going to tell the lady three rows up that she needs to stop filming me and my colleagues? Is there an established code for the senior flight attendant to follow? Does he or she feel empowered to tell the man in 2A that he needs to stop using the loudspeaker on his phone for his conference call? Or has someone on the “customer experience” team deemed it out of bounds to curb how passengers use technology?

At levels ranging from federal to municipal, much time is spent on legislation for creating quieter cities (I'm not sure whether cities are meant to be hushed but we'll save that discussion for another day), such

“I've yet to see a technology company take a leading role in setting standards for how society should behave with phones, tablets or cameras”

as more soundproofed buildings and less drinking and chatter after 23.00. At the same time there's a lot of posturing and PR surrounding data protection that might be well-intentioned but does little in the way of ensuring privacy in practice when virtually every device is also an audio and video recorder.

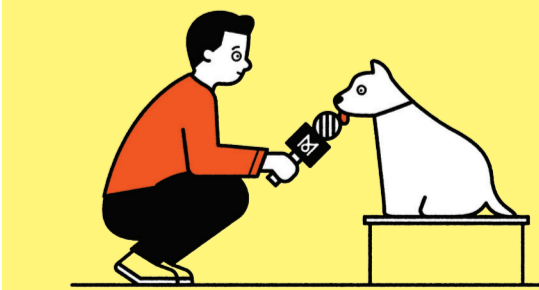
Countries with a strong sense of social capital (Japan, Switzerland and corners of Germany) have it best, as deep-rooted social codes help govern how people behave in public settings. The screaming child is taken out of the restaurant rather than engaged in a negotiation, the phone is placed in a pocket and not on the table, meetings start with a firm handshake and women are greeted first, food is not scooped into one's mouth while walking down the street. You get the idea. If you step out of line with your mobile device in Switzerland there's a good chance that a fellow commuter, shopkeeper or manager will tell you how to behave or ask you to watch your Youtube clips at home. The result is that most tram or train journeys don't have the added din of tiny speakers amid all the other daily noise, and travelling from A to B can be a civilised experience for citizens who respect codes of the public realm. Try asking a fellow passenger to turn down their headphones on public transport in London or Toronto and at best you'll be told to piss off; at worst you'll find yourself in the back of an ambulance bloodied and humiliated.

At a recent dinner in Zürich, friends from the legal and medical worlds agreed that the next hotbed of litigation is going to be around digital devices and their unchecked impact on society and mental health. “A smart company would either take the lead and slap a warning on their boxes or, better yet, take an active role in curbing behaviours,” said a medical doctor. “Just as the tobacco industry has had to pay out, technology companies will soon have to account for their harmful, addictive impact on daily life.”



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