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A HOUSE IS A HOUSE
TWO HOUSES ARE TWO HOUSES
THOUSANDS OF HOUSES... ARE A TOWN...

DOM JEST DOMEM,
DWA DOMY TO DWA DOMY
A TYSIĄCE DOMÓW ...TO MIASTO...

Abstract

From a group of houses to a city, what matters is the aggregation system. Attempts are many. It's very interesting to study an example that produced good results over time, different in scale and contents: the Olympic Games, and the way, almost hidden, but stimulating, with which they gradually "built" their "Villages", over more than a century. You can observe the extraordinary ways that people and cities have invented, to create the kind of "temporary housing" that is the Olympic Village. A suggestion on the needed virtues.

Keywords: Housing, Olympic Villages, Residence in history, Temporary houses, Ancient Virtues

Streszczenie

Od grupy domów do miasta – ważny jest układ skupienia. Próby są różne. Interesujące jest studiowanie przykładu, który sprawdził się w czasie, a był różny w skali i treści: olimpiady, i sposób, ukryty lecz stymulujący, w jaki stopniowo „budowano” ich „wioski”, przez ponad stulecie. Można obserwować niezwykle, wymyślone sposoby utworzenia „tymczasowego mieszkania” – czym jest wioska olimpijska. Sugestia potrzebnych cnót.

Słowa kluczowe: budownictwo mieszkaniowe, wioski olimpijskie, domy w historii, domy tymczasowe, antyczne cnoty

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A home is more important than a house. But as an architect, you have to design a house. A lot of them and you get a town. But you need something more...

How do you aggregate them? When do a bunch of houses become a town?

A home is a home for all your life. But a house has to “survive” you, or better live longer than you...

Here we get an anthropological question: does a new house have to live longer than us, or the contrary? For an ancient builder the answer was certain: the house had to live for “ever”. For a contemporary builder the answer is “certainly” the contrary.

But normally a house is intended to be a home for the full extension of your life. But it is also a home for the duration of many different lives.

The greatest interest for those who study these problems lies in discovering how and when a large group of houses becomes a city. Certainly the number is important; but then you also need the right kind of aggregation.

One, many buildings ... but many buildings alone are only a periphery (although without a centre!). An ancient cluster, a knotted bunch of houses in the Italian Apennines instead, could pretend to be a town.

What really matters is the aggregation system, related to the various activities, in connection with the different urban activities made possible there.

More urban activities – made possible over time, the greater the durability of this urban aggregation.

To “exercise” this urban living and housing – using here this verb because a town’s life comes not only from its design, but also from the general behaviour of its community – all that requires ancient skills: like all human things they require care and study, and they have to be updated, even if advance is not necessarily progress.

Some of the oldest rules are always valid, even if you are looking at them in a seemingly ever new way.

If we look through an interesting article in *The Economist*, we discover many “new” clarifications.

Today the fad in south Florida is not golf villages or retro towns but ready-made city centres¹.

... All will combine “walkable” shopping streets, offices and homes—mostly two – and three-bedroom flats in towers. Similar developments have appeared in other American cities, and beyond. But Florida is being overrun.

Builders call these developments “mixed-use”, a term that fails to capture what they are up to. The idea of combining flats, offices and shops even in a single building is not new: look at an old New York district like Chelsea. Metropica and its kin try to create urban cores in places that lack them. Whereas new urbanist settlements often promote a small-town ideal, these sell big-city life, which is why they have words like “metro”, “city” and “centre” in their names. The salesmen claim that residents will be able to live, work and be entertained in a single district. ... But creating the appearance of urbanity is not the same as making a city. Cities are supposed to be cosmopolitan and surprising; they ought to change in unpredictable ways. Mixed-use developments, by contrast, are fully-formed when they are built—and are too costly for the poor. They are not supposed to be diverse. John Hitchcox of Yoo, a design firm that has worked on

¹ *The future of cities. Ersatz urbanism.* *The Economist*, April 30th 2016.

Metropica and many other projects, says that mixed-use developments aim to create communities of like-minded people. Though they look like cities, they are supposed to feel like villages.

...

Quite interesting: they are now “inventing” – as if it were a new core – what was the core of the ancient towns! I think managers and economists will call that “innovation”!

But then, where to search for real examples?

In effect among modern examples it is very difficult to find positive ones. Attempts are many.

I have, however, found it very interesting to study an example that has produced good results over time, all very different in scale and contents, but all derived from a single kind of effort.

That is the example of the Olympic Villages. Intended here only as a problem of residence.

The architectures of the Games are important for the most spectacular sports facilities, but they are much less famous for the way, almost hidden, but very stimulating, with which they “built” gradually their “Villages”, during more than a century.

Generally speaking, nothing appears to be very sensational, but in the long term you can discover that the difficult task of designing them brings very useful solutions, also good for the city in subsequent years.

The interesting reason for this lies in the way the Villages must be designed.

In practice, the problem is set in these terms: It is necessary to accommodate for two months thousands of people (there are now about 25,000) in precise spaces and if possible in neighbourhoods (like an ancient city), by making or arranging a structure which will serve in the future to accommodate families and people (half that number), for an indefinitely longer time.

The problem is posed here in a simple way, but the solution is not simple; and it has been solved in the past century in many different ways, always interesting, always useful for the development of the city, often capable of great innovation.

Accommodation may not be one of the most spectacular themes of the Olympic Games, but it can still be dealt with from an intellectual perspective. It may be less discussed than other elements of the Games, but historically it has had a significant impact on the design and financial aspects of the Olympics. The theme of Olympic accommodation is also a key factor in the relationship between the Games and the host cities².

There are a great many lessons to be learned by a city as a whole from this architecture and from these events. Lots of international events can attract large numbers of people, stimulate ideas and inspire architects and municipalities to give the very best, but the Olympic Games are perhaps the most important event of all.

The World Cup now seems to be almost exclusively organised for TV addicts and the international media, and can have an enormous impact, especially in the short term. The same can be said for the great International Expos. Yet these events, in the long term, have far less impact than the Olympics, which often leave a more durable, living legacy.

Because here, where sport is in command (as long as it commands ...), something very different is happening.

² A. Pratelli, M. Bortolotti, *Abitare Olimpia. The architecture of the Olympic Villages*, BUP Bononia University Press, 2011.



III. 1. 1924, Paris, Olympic Village III. 2. 1932, Amsterdam, "Olympic Village" III. 3. 1972, Munich, Olympic Village III. 4. 1994, Lillehammer, Olympic Village III. 5. 1988, Seoul, Olympic Village III. 6. Prudentia, Prudence, sixteenth century, Bologna

This seemed to me a real issue to be studied, and for that I applied to this study.

The difference is impressive if we examine the development of this theme over the last century.

From the 19th century onwards, the great International Expos have had a very strong impact, in both entertainment and technological terms. As a means of comparing new products from all over the world, they force the different nations involved to give their very best, and the host nation is obliged, and inspired, to invent a “new world”. Important examples include the Crystal Palace from the 1851 International Exhibition in London, or the 1889 Parisian Expo, which resulted in the Eiffel Tower and the Galerie des Machines, with their spectacular structures.

Since then, although they are still very important, their influence has decreased somewhat in comparison to that of other international events.

The World Cup, in contrast, has become increasingly important, but this is mainly due to its ever-growing popularity in terms of television viewing.

The opposite can be observed in the history of the Olympic Games.

The first editions appeared to be the gatherings of “insane” sport enthusiasts, and the first villages, which date from around 1924, almost thirty years after the first edition, seemed to be little more than well-organised camp-sites. When we compare them to the Olympic Games of today, we can see what a great deal of progress has been made.

Nevertheless, the most interesting thing is that this progress not only reflects the changes to the society we live in, but comes as a result of the inherent qualities of the Olympics, their values and the reasons for their existence.

The Olympics mirror contemporary society, and represent a new step in the history of the host nation. The host nation is forced to create a living experiment for the Olympics which can transform the entire city.

But why?

When an Expo finishes, it tends to leave a great deal of chaos, with a lot of empty monuments left behind with no particular purpose. Are they dedicated to the market, or trade, or to globalization? It is difficult to determine.

When a World Cup ends, it leaves great buildings with a specific purpose, which are appropriate only for a single, particular objective.

The Olympics, on the other hand, are capable of transforming an entire city. They create a kind of unique urban experiment, providing an opportunity for the city to plan and create facilities that that will also be widely used in the future, once the Games have come to an end.

The Olympic Games bring thousands of people (athletes, trainers, executives and staff) to a city for a very short time (still less than for a expo), with specific and different assignments, around the various areas. At the same time, they are joined by hundreds of thousands of people, including spectators, fans and many others who go from place to place, to different games and districts, without a single, fixed destination.

They carry on different activities in different places, sometimes going to a variety of locations and at other times coming together in one place for a while.

They act and they see acting, they stop and move, someone along, someone for a very short time.

People act just as they would in a real city, and so the Olympic Village becomes a kind of urban experiment, rather than just a collection of specific buildings.

When an Olympic Games comes to an end, there is relatively little material waste... life goes on, with the results of an extreme experiment for the host city. The Games represent a tangible test of whether the city has the strength to find its identity, to recreate its image, and to compete with the world.

This is the starting point, when it comes to designing the residential areas of the Olympics. Everything is created with its future purpose in mind, as well as its use during the Games.

It is exciting to observe, starting from the difficult first steps, the various, extraordinary ways that people and cities have invented, over the course of the last century, to create the kind of “temporary housing” that is the Olympic Village.

An incredible event; an almost unique city experiment, an opportunity for the city to design and build a prototype of itself, for future use.

In short: it is a real city, a great and true experiment in applied urban planning; but it is never a simple sum of many special buildings.

Anyone who is familiar, or is just interested in the history of architecture or the history of some important architectural organism – and Italy is formed just of these – certainly knows that very rarely buildings retain, over the centuries, their unique and original function.

Their value, however, is often enhanced by the inherent ability they have to adapt to different events or to take new life and new value from various events, an ability not necessarily planned, but inherent in the ways of their original design.

This is the starting point for the design of residential areas of the Olympic facilities.

All systems, also and especially those intended for housing (even if not only those) will be used in the future for different purposes. They must be designed with just that starting point in mind.

But if we look carefully, we recognize that not as a special element: it is rather the true “element” of any true planning. No building in fact, in its history, will only serve only one function, over time it will always be updated, or changed.

It is therefore a specific design, as difficult as realistic.

It is certainly exciting to review in the history – starting from the very beginning – the various attempts and the different ways used to realize the Village.

But every time the problem was to design something “intelligent” that could be used afterwards in a different way.

From ships, to barracks, from a kind of neighbourhoods, to new villages...

In Paris in 1924 it seemed to be only a first experiment, very similar to what today we would consider a campsite.

In Amsterdam 1928, people would still stay on the ships, those by which the athletes had arrived, from all over the world.

In Los Angeles 1932, they tried to find the example of a village for a “new economy”, after the 1929 crisis. And that was the only time that the USA built something new, without using existing buildings. And here the prefabricated homes, intended for sale after the Olympics, and for prototypes of new simple technologies...

Then the most different experiments.

Melbourne 1956, temporary houses, which would have remained “temporary” over time, although with increasingly different destinations. They served immediately after for new immigrants, then for people in need, and still today, like then, they appear to be “temporary”...

Rome 1960, comes back with difficulty in mind, but is instead a demonstration that a good project, when it has a “meaning”, can be worthwhile over time.

Mexico City 1968, a new Village that for the period was a really a new way to expand a city, from the *murals* to the large residential condominiums.

Monaco 1972, from the individual student housing to the high concentration condos, in general of a brand new concept, “walkable” you would say today.

There from the beginning it was an urban destination in seemingly one-way: the centre of sports and leisure time of Monaco. But also 140 hectares, where the Olympic Village arose, which were transformed from a desolate plain, to a green park.

The first time for such a great “rehabilitation” of an entire landscape, afterwards carried out many times, for example in Sydney 2000 or London 2012.

And along with great facilities and the village also radio and television equipment, and considerable infrastructure. Street furniture of the highest level, and a graphic that would become a reference point in subsequent years.

Several subway lines that bring all downtown and liaison with the railways and highways; from the second part of the last century all Games have been a starting point for great improvement in all kinds of transport facilities.

We also had perplexing examples, but which were positive because they have worked. For example, in 1980 Lake Placid (Winter), where buildings have been transformed into prisons.

On the contrary in 1994 Lillehammer (Winter), a part was later disassembled, and a part became a fine example of a small alpine village.

Then Montreal 1976, that for economic problems seemed to curb the fast growth in the history of the Games.

Then Moscow 1980 with its palaces a bit “sad”, even though all things considered functional.

Seoul 1988, where it was eventually clear how important the Games could be in opening a country to the world, and vice-versa.

Sydney 2000, which opened the path to the sustainable architecture. Here in many houses some “previous” rooms were later transformed into the necessary garages, with a solution you can believe only by studying the projects.

Very different, and in some points now more difficult, are the Villages dedicated to the Winter Games. The real mountain towns actually are normally too small to accommodate the many people that are needed.

In Cortina d’Ampezzo 1956, athletes stayed directly only in the Hotels (never try to repeat this strange solution)...

There is always a very practical or sensible solution. Innsbruck for instance is the only town that twice hosted the Winter Games (first 1964), but only because it was clear that nobody else was ready for the 1976.

Then Grenoble 1968, Torino 2004, Vancouver 2010 show that some difficulties can be overcome only by big cities, that, on the other hand, show new and different problems, especially those related to transport and connections between the sports facilities.

While the issues of this last century, since 2000, are becoming different in many points and have to be studied in a different way (both for the summer and winter Games).

But we tend always to ask ourselves what virtues we need to reach the success of these complex operations.

I do not know if it’s a coincidence, but the virtues (like in Italian and in Latin) are of female gender...

One may say: we would need the *common sense*, or better the *good sense*. But we know that the good sense is a gift, perhaps the truest art, but also the more difficult to exercise.

I found these virtues in an old house, in the house where I pretend I was born. There are there two statues, since many centuries.

For years no one ever really understood who were the subjects.

They were said to be Mars and Diana, two gods they might resemble. But we knew this “solution” was not true.

These are the statues.

Then, during a precise restoration, going directly upon the scaffolding, we were able to see what is not visible.

In the past a lot of things, even hugely important, were hidden. Perhaps they knew that the appearance leads to brief success, but also to a subsequent, immediate disappearance.

Appearance was not “the” reason for living.

Because life *is*, life *is* for the plain fact of its existence, and its desired appearance today only brings us to a more obvious caducity.

Here the discovery.

The person apparently armed is not armed. It is not a warrior, and as obvious if you look at it, is a female.

And the other is not a hunter. Look how she holds her foot gently leaning, almost to caress the deer (which is not injured). Look how she moves.

The reason is hidden.

You will never see the reason, in no way whatsoever, except during the restoration.

It’s hard to understand today a choice so undisclosed and secret, made up more than four centuries ago.

The two statues are not gods. They are virtues.

One is *fortitudo*, the fortress. Strength, stability, courage, one of the four cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance.

The other is *prudentia*, prudence.

Prudence can see behind, on her back..., sometimes is represented with a mirror, in order to be able to see behind (Pollaiuolo, Botticelli did it this way, if I remember correctly), sometimes it is shown with three eyes. A young mind, but with an ancient experience (a young head, but with a mature brain ...).

In this case here is revealed the secret: on the back of the statue’s head we can see the face of an old woman (once to call oneself old was an index of wisdom, and you didn’t need to pretend to be *otherwise* young).

A mature brain in a girl’s head.

Maybe so, over time, the towns can live, experiencing their different ways to be a “pack” of houses.

Here, finally, I leave this image: *Prudence*. I never thought I could use it to tell the story of dwelling and living. Yet today it appeared me to be necessary!

Finally one last, small teaching to catch and assimilate: when you study something, look at the bottom, behind, where you cannot see; there is always something hidden.

Something that is simple, clear, important ... but that you cannot see!