

A Case Study of the Sustainability Narratives in the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics

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Abstract: The 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics faced many difficulties in the field of sustainable development. These included the reduced attractiveness of the Olympic Games as well as a certain prejudice and misunderstanding that China faces, coming mainly from western society. Encouraged by the Olympic slogan "Together to the Future", Beijing developed new technologies and explored new ideas in order to better integrate sports, economy and culture, and promote the sustainable development of the games. Taking the Winter Olympics as an opportunity, Beijing improved its sports infrastructures and industry and made useful explorations in the management of the Olympic legacy. The contribution made by the Beijing Winter Olympics in the field of sustainable development is the topic of this paper.

Keywords: the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics; Sustainable Development; Sports Development; Environment Protection; Legacy Management.

INTRODUCTION

The 24th Winter Olympics closed successfully in February 2022, and made Beijing the first city to host both the Summer and Winter Olympics. Compared to the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics, the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics were faced with the complex situation of hosting after the changes brought about in the world by post-pandemic. Despite the turmoil, the Beijing Winter Olympics revealed its slogan as "Together for a Shared Future", which embodies the core values and vision of the Olympic Movement, and the goal of pursuing world unity, peace and progress (IOC 2022). In the preparation and the hosting of the Winter Olympics, Beijing had emphasized the concept of sustainable development, but the situation Beijing faced is more complex and difficult than most Olympic Games. This paper focuses mainly on the problems and needs faced during the organization of the Beijing Winter Olympics, particularly concerning in sustainable development, and explores the specific measures made in response to these problems.

THE COMPLEX SITUATION OF BEIJING WINTER OLYMPICS

The Increasingly Complex Situation of Olympic Hosting

In the last decades, the Olympic Games are facing an embarrassing situation: the willingness to bid for hosting the games is declining. There are different reasons for this situation, including economic turmoil, political instability, poor management, local residents' opposition, etc. To these reasons one can add concerns with sustainable development. When a city gives up halfway through when bidding for the Olympics, it might be due to the belief that the large investments in hosting would not be sustainable or beneficial to the city in its development.

The Tokyo Olympics, originally planned to be held in 2020, were postponed to 2021 due to the pandemic. Data released in 2022 showed that the Tokyo Olympics achieved a balanced budget of JPY 640.4 billion (USD 5.8 billion), while the total Games expenditures, including those borne by the Government of Japan and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, were JPY 1,423.8 billion (USD 13.0 billion) (IOC News 2022). Thus, the positive effects of the Olympics on Japan were very limited.

Not only that, the global political and economic situation is currently undergoing structural changes. In China, people speak of great changes unseen in over a century. The international community faces multiple challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic brought a major health crisis and hindered global economic exchanges. The world economy was hit hard, and international trade and investment have decreased significantly. This crisis might bring about the worst recession since the Great Depression in the 1930s. When this kind of social and political crises occur, many large-scale international events are postponed or suspended. Thus, the hosting of the Olympic Games has met increasing problems and intense pressure. In this situation, China felt it duty to host the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics and bring about some changes in the direction of their sustainability.

The Negative Public Opinion against Beijing

In the past few years, since the Beijing Winter Olympics and Winter Paralympics, there were voices that spoke of a diplomatic boycott. Instead

of dealing with the values of sportsmanship, some of these voices, were aimed at stigmatizing China.

Before COVID-19, China had already been involved in public opinion wars, in particular regarding the situation with Taiwan, Hong Kong, Xinjiang, as well as other issues. Under the deliberate guidance of some powers, a large amount of false information and fake news about China flooded the international media. Even before the Beijing Winter Olympics, some media presented an evil image of China in areas such as economy, democracy, human rights, environmental protection, etc. Their powerful influence misled the international public to a negative view of China.

Although most of the reports of the international media around the Beijing Winter Olympics are objective and well-meaning, there are still a large number of biased reports and a long-term historical accumulation of negative ideas, which has brought a lot of pressure and obstacles to the Beijing Winter Olympics. Therefore, the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics had to face enormous pressure on different fields and levels in the preparation stage. China still tried to make them one of the most successful games.

Sustainability, as a value that is embraced by all nations, was a key element that Beijing emphasized. This paper focuses on what had been done in the Beijing Winter Olympics from the perspective of a sustainable narrative.

CHINA'S EFFORTS IN THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE OLYMPICS

China regarded the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics as a major opportunity to promote domestic development, strengthen world unity, and enhance its image abroad. Thomas Bach, IOC President, wrote in an open letter:

Being united by our Olympic values of peace, solidarity, respect and unity in all our diversity, we can make an important contribution to this post-coronavirus world. We can do so from a strong basis. (Bach 2020: n.p.)

The International Olympic Committee continues to hold that Olympic values can help reshape post-pandemic world, including promoting the improvement of global governance, building a healthier and more

inclusive society, promoting the green recovery of the world economy, and building a more peaceful, diverse, inclusive, and integrated world.

These values are highly consistent with the concept of "a community with a shared future for mankind," the motto proposed at the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012. Combining the Olympic values with this concept, China presented the official slogan "Towards the Future Together", which expresses the core value and vision of the people of the world to work together, help each other, and create a better future. Therefore, the organizers of Beijing Winter Olympics undertook huge mission in the field of global sustainability even from the very beginning of the games preparations.

China tried to use the opportunity of the Winter Olympics to create a friendly, inclusive, clean, efficient, and confident national image to the world, and to integrate the concepts of "One Belt, One Road" and "A Community with a Shared Future "(With this concept, China calls on the people of all countries to work together to build a community with a shared future for mankind, to build an open, inclusive, clean, and beautiful world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security, and common prosperity, see Wu Huiyong "A Confucian Holistic World Order and China's Vision of a Shared Future" 2018) with the values of the Winter Olympics, while also tried to embrace and integrate into the world's mainstream value system. The Beijing Winter Olympic Organizing Committee implemented sustainability policies and plans, innovated sustainability management models, created sustainability management systems, and integrated sustainability requirements into the entire process of event preparation and organization. Its narrative of sustainability emphasized both ethnicity and commonality and sought narratives that can bridge China and China and the West, and the tradition, modernity, and the future. This narrative shows the following characteristics.

Emphasis on human-centeredness. China tried to optimize humanized management, and it took the health and well-being of athletes, the participation of ordinary people, and the employment opportunities of local people as breakthrough points, and directed the world's attention to the well-being and development of each person as an individual.

Multi-level and diverse narratives. Emphasis was placed on both the macro structure at the government level and the micro perspective of the ordinary participants to show the details of how the concept of

sustainability is manifested in the Winter Olympics. In this way China tried to motivate builders, workers, athletes, and spectators of the Winter Olympics to fully understand and promote the concept of sustainability.

Combination of legacy and innovation. China highlighted Beijing's legacy of the 2008 Olympic legacy as the first city to host both the Summer and Winter Olympics. Beijing passed on the people-centered ideas, making full use of the hardware facilities of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, while also inheriting and developing the exuberant spirit of the 2008 Beijing Olympics. On the basis of the inheritance, a large number of the latest technologies are used. The Beijing Winter Olympics adhered to the ecological ideology of respecting nature, conforming to nature and protecting nature, and took the route of technology-driven development, and created a rich ecological legacy for the international Olympic movement.

In order to achieve the goals of sustainability in the fields of sports, economy, and culture communication, China made some useful explorations for the 2022 Winter Olympics. In the following lines, the paper mentions some aspects of –China's sports industry, environmental protection, and legacy management.

Sports Industry Development and Participation of Residents

In *Sport Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*, UNWTO describes “How sport tourism can contribute to SDGs” as following:

Sport tourism provides local residents of a destination with sport opportunities which can have positive impacts on residents and tourists alike, leading to a healthy and active lifestyle. Sport activities can bring about self-fulfillment and enhance self-confidence among local people, through which the locals are empowered. [...] It is preferable to promote sport activities not only to visitors but also local residents for health and well-being of their own. If visitors and residents participate in the same sport programmes, it also brings about good opportunities for them to interact, which enhance visitor satisfaction and local pride. In this sense, sport opportunities for the locals and sport tourism can be developed hand in hand. (UNWTO)

As ice and snow sports in most parts of China were relatively advanced, it was necessary to rapidly promote the modernization of the ice and snow industry chain. Before 2018, China's ice and snow industry and most of the ice and snow events at all levels were mainly held by the government.

This system greatly split the supply and demand relationship, and hindered efficient and healthy competition and the overall development of the industrial chain. The construction of the entire industrial chain was flawed, the regional development was extremely unbalanced, and the ability to resist risks was relatively weak.

To change such a condition, the General Administration of Sports of the People's Republic of China formulated an outline to implement the "300 million people's participation in the ice and snow campaign (2018-2022)". on September 5, 2018. This outline states: "We will focus on enhancing people's physique and improving people's health, and we will implement the strategy of expanding ice and snow sports in all areas in China to vigorously popularize mass ice and snow sports." This outline proposed seven work measures, including enriching ice and snow sports, cultivating ice and snow culture, strengthening personnel training, increasing the supply of venues and facilities, perfecting standards and regulations, strengthening service system, etc. (2020)

Following this outline, China had begun to strongly cultivate and support the ice and snow enterprises by providing preferential policies such as government cooperation or government subsidies in the early stages of development of key enterprises. Meanwhile, China vigorously facilitated the construction of digital technology infrastructure to promote the digital application and online development of the ice and snow sports industry. The online platform is used to strengthen the coordinated development of the industry, improve the cultural added value of the products, and expand the influence of ice and snow culture.

In the field of sustainability for the Winter Olympics, sports promotion is the basic level. With the stimulating effect of the successful bid for the Winter Olympics and the comprehensive breakthrough in the competition results, China tried to develop a super-large ice and snow sports market with 300 million people through policy guidance, improve the corresponding system and standard system, and accelerate the development of high-tech and Internet technology to upgrade the entire ice and snow industry chain. Although not a traditional ice and snow sports country, China tried to avoid making the Winter Olympics an isolated sports event, but to take this opportunity to comprehensively improve the whole industry, and give it lasting development momentum. In this way, China could better develop an inherited culture of ice and

snow sports, and people from all groups and areas actively participate in ice and snow sports.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

In recent decades, the Olympic Games have increased their efforts in ecological protection. In 2014, *the Olympic Agenda 2020* (IOC, 2014) proposed 40 reform measures, focusing on the sustainable development of the Olympic Movement. In 2018, *Olympic Agenda 2020 Olympic Games: the New Norm* was released, and 118 specific measures were proposed, focusing on solving problems such as the surge in the cost of hosting the Olympic Games and the damage to the environment, and further determining that the Olympic Games should follow the basic orientation of sustainable development.

The Beijing Winter Olympics paid great attention to sustainable development. In the pre-competition report of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics (Beijing Organising Committee for the 2022 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games 2022), it was pointed out that The Beijing 2022 Games is the first Olympic Games that follows the Olympic Agenda 2020 by the International Olympic Committee throughout its preparations and hosting. Beijing 2022 has honoured its commitments at the bid for the Beijing 2022 Games, to implement sustainability policies and plans, innovating the sustainability management model, integrating relevant sustainability requirements into the preparations and staging of the Beijing 2022 Games, and promoting various measures with the Games partners and stakeholders in a coordinated manner to achieve the agreed sustainable development goals.

The report shows that when bidding for the Beijing Winter Olympics, Beijing implemented the principles of sustainable development in the fields of conception, planning, management, infrastructure and ecological protection, and made commitments related to sustainability covering 28 categories. Till September 30 2021, 98% of the commitments have been fulfilled, and remarkable results have been achieved.

Beijing placed special emphasis on key tasks such as the protection of ecosystems and biodiversity and the enhancement of environmental

management. Based on the relevant experience of the previous Olympic Games, Beijing have increased investment in various related fields.

In 2017, Beijing set up a "Sustainability Work Leading Group", which is especially responsible for strategic advice, planning, organization, coordination and implementation of sustainability work related to the 2022 Winter Olympics. In terms of the specific environmental management system, Beijing has effectively integrated the ISO20121 *Event Sustainability Management System* and the ISO14001 *Environmental Management System* as the management path, took the social responsibility identification and stakeholder participation of the ISO26000 *Guidance on Social Responsibility* as the working method, and established a highly efficient, full-coverage sustainable management mechanism. The Yanqing competition zone innovatively made sustainability requirements as a special part in the construction engineering design, and put forward the corresponding design requirements in construction projects. (Beijing Organising Committee 2022)

In terms of protection of the natural environment and biological components, the Beijing Winter Olympics minimized the impact on the environment in large-scale events through rigorous planning and design, including collecting stripped topsoil, meadows, and vegetation in the competition zone for future transplantation, reconstruction, and resurfacing after the Winter Olympics. In addition, many high-tech and innovative means were introduced to save resources and protect the environment. China used one single platform to manage the intelligent snowmaking system in a comprehensive manner, which greatly optimizes the allocation of water resources. The use of carbon dioxide direct cooling ice system saved 2 million kilowatt-hours of electricity a year in the three major Olympics venues, including the National Speed Skating Stadium. (Han 2021: 10) Green building materials and ultra-low energy consumption technologies are also widely used in venue construction. Through the use of photovoltaic and wind power generation, local donation of forestry carbon sinks, and corporate sponsorship of certified carbon emission reductions, the Beijing Winter Olympics has successfully fulfilled its commitment to achieving carbon neutrality and became the first "carbon-neutral" Winter Olympics. (Li 2022) Over all, the Beijing Winter Olympics inherited the ecological legacy of the previous Olympic

Games and provided a new paradigm of green development for the international Olympic movement.

In addition, similar to other Olympic Games, the Beijing Winter Olympics has improved infrastructure renewal and promoted tourism development. It also used the Olympic Games as an opportunity to promote the reuse of industrial legacy and led to the transformation and comprehensive revival of old industrial areas. The goal of sustainable economic development has also been successfully achieved.

LEGACYMANAGEMENT

In 2014, the International Olympic Committee promulgated the Olympic Agenda 2020, which formally stated that the process of bidding for the Olympic Games should focus on sustainability and legacy. In December 2017, the International Olympic Committee issued a legacy strategic policy, which defined the Olympic legacy in detail (IOC 2017), set 4 strategic goals for the development of the Olympic legacy, and introduced ways to achieve them.

However, there were no established international rules for the management of the Olympic legacy, and differences in national conditions and cultures would also result in different models for planning and managing such legacy. The Beijing Winter Olympics needed to take into account the current development demands of the Olympics and the specific trend of Beijing's urban development in the future. And the IOC needed to find a sample model for the organization and management of the future Olympic Games in the current complicated situation.

The Beijing Winter Olympics literally became the first Olympic Games that comprehensively planned and managed the Olympic legacy from the very beginning after the promulgation of the "*Olympic 2020 Agenda*". In September 2017, the Beijing Winter Olympics Organizing Committee set up an independent Legacy Office and the Legacy Coordination Working Committee and then published its own legacy strategic plan. During the preparation process for the Beijing Winter Olympics, legacy concepts and practices were always emphasized.

Based on the IOC's legacy strategic policy, the Beijing Organizing Committee for the 2022 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games released the "The Legacy Plan of the Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games

Beijing 2022"(2019), covering 7 aspects of sports, economy, society, culture, environment, urban development and regional development and 35 subdivisional fields of planning, creation and application of the Winter Olympics legacy.

We can find the following four characteristics of the legacy work of the Beijing Winter Olympics.

1. Comprehensive planning in advance. Beijing initiated the special governance of the legacy work of the 2022 Winter Olympic in 2017. It also actively integrated the legacy concept in all the stages of preparation works and regularly summarized the staged results.
2. Inheritance. As the first city to host both the Summer and Winter Olympics, the Beijing Winter Olympics effectively utilizes the legacy of the 2008 Olympic Games in terms of venue facilities, later operations, talent training and game hosting mechanism, and made innovation on this basis. It is an unprecedented achievement of Beijing to perfectly transform the 2008 Summer Olympic legacy into the facilities for the 2022 Winter Olympics. Among the main venues in the Beijing Winter Olympics, five are directly based on the 2008 Beijing Olympic venues, including the National Aquatics Center "Water Cube", the National Gymnasium, the Wukesong Sports Center and its supporting facilities, the National Speed Skating Stadium ("Ice Ribbon"), and the Capital Gymnasium. Beijing has realized the "water-ice conversion" and "land-ice conversion" of the venues for the 2022 Beijing Olympic Games. The Big Air Shougang, which was repurposed from a steel mill, became the world's first permanent grand diving platform. Venues such as the National Ski Jumping Center in the Zhangjiakou competition zone also focused on comprehensive post-competition utilization and created a national sports industry demonstration base through socialization and market-oriented operation, creating a fully inclusive, full-season, full-time and full-region ice and snow entertainment center and summer resort.
3. Promotion of Development. Beijing set a good example of legacy management through the interaction and mutual nurturing between the Olympic Games and regional development. In the preparation of the Winter Olympics, China continuously improved infrastructure and enhanced the level of coordinated cross-regional development and the ability of refined urban governance. Following the idea of "co-hosting"

of the Olympic Agenda 2020, the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics is the first Olympic Games that clearly and formally proposed the idea of regional development legacy. The three competition zones of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics are connected by a high-speed rail, three expressways, and multiple arterial traffic. During the preparation and hosting of the Winter Olympics, Beijing and Hebei Province complemented each other in the fields of environmental governance, industrial development, public services, medical industry, education, and poverty alleviation, and the three competition zones achieved coordinated development in various fields.

4. Humanistic orientation. Beijing adhered to the people-centered approach by accelerating the development and access to ice and snow sports, and improving national fitness and health. The Ministry of Sports of the People's Republic of China has vigorously promoted ice and snow sports on campus and integrated the development of the ice and snow industry into the national industrial strategy. Since the Beijing Municipal Government issued the "Opinions on Accelerating the Development of Ice and Snow Sports (2016-2020)" in 2016, the number of participants and the level of competition in various ice and snow sports have increased significantly, and the growth trend is still continuing. The relevant legacy of the Winter Olympics has been strategically planned with the goal of high-quality and sustainable development, specifically focusing on promoting ice and snow sports and education, and improving the concepts of environmental protection and healthy living habits in the whole society. As a result, the legacy of the Beijing Winter Olympics were integrated with the practice of ecological protection, sustainable development, and sports promotion. In doing so, Beijing aims to radiate the motivation force to development of the entire economy and society, and to benefit the production and living condition of the general public. The 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics made great efforts to become an iconic achievement in the history of Olympic Games in the field of legacy management.

CONCLUSION

In the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, Beijing had made some achievement in the field of sustainable development. First, it is necessary to promote

the industry through development to drive economic and social development. At the same time, it is also necessary to pay attention to energy saving and environmental protection. And various successful experiences must be shared and passed on. And all these efforts should focus on the idea of humanistic-orientation.

The current world has been very complex and unpredictable, and in 2022, it has become even worse than before. The efforts of the Beijing Winter Olympics cannot completely reverse many prejudices and stereotypes in the international community, but this event still provided a peaceful platform for the world to learn from each other, promote each other, and face the future together. In the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, we found that Olympic values and Chinese civilization can coexist in harmony. China maintained the concept of sustainable development of human beings, innovated in health and well-being for all, sustainable economy, management, environmental protection, culture, and other fields, bridged different countries in the world, and set a new model to promote the community with a shared future for mankind.

When the whole world is facing uncertainty, the Olympics are also inevitably impacted. However, the internationalism of Olympism itself should still be cherished. The hosting of the Beijing Winter Olympics might be taken as an important symbol in the formation of a fairer and more united international order. China is actively exploring the effective integration of the rejuvenation of its own civilization and the building of a community with a shared future for mankind, in order to realize the common development of the world. China did a lot for the sustainable global development in hosting the Winter Olympics. All the efforts and the achievements belong to the entire human race and should not be neglected or ignored.

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Bioprofile

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