

# Emerging Discourses: Olympic Bids

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The Athletic

I think it's possible, but unlikely. The problem with the Olympics is the same problem we see in a lot of related megaprojects that involve huge public subsidies - the guaranteed benefits flow to a small group at the top of the scheme, while the public is stuck with the expenses and risk.

What's particularly strange about the Olympics is they have become funding schemes for local governments. In Canada, civic governments only have one funding mechanism: property taxes. Otherwise, they have to go to the Provincial and Federal governments, hat in hand. The Olympics, then, are now a mechanism to concentrate enough political will to pour in bonus funding from the other levels of governments, money that may not have been made available otherwise. This is why you see local politicians, economic development groups, and community organizer types get behind a bid.

This is bad for a couple of reasons. First, it ties a bunch of unrelated and marginally-related infrastructure spending to the games, ballooning an already bloated budget. In fact, if a city needs funding for certain capital projects, it makes far more sense to fund them outside of a mega project, which comes with a whole host of knock-on costs (such as security, games-specific structures, etc.)

Secondly, as long as governments and municipalities are willing to throw billions of dollars at the Olympics, there will be no motivation for the IOC to lower corruption and increase efficiency. Like professional sports clubs, who learned decades ago that they could play cities off each in order to get free publicly funded arenas, the IOC has used an auction-like bid system to line their pockets at the expense of the general public.

The best summary I can offer is this quote, from Bent Flyvbjerg, who conducted research called the "Oxford Olympics Study 2016: Cost and Cost Overrun at the Games:"

"For a city and nation to decide to stage the Olympic games is to decide to take on one of the most costly and financially most risky type of megaproject that exists, something that many cities and national have learned to their peril."

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Emerging Discourses, Olympic Bids and Mega-Events

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