Is Sustainability a Game to you?
Displacing the LA28 Olympic Games and Envisioning a Sustainable Alternative

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Table of contents

Acknowledgements……...…….....2

Abstract…….....3

There's Only One Olympics ……4
A History of Suppression, Displacement and Degradation…….....6

How the Residents of Los Angeles are Threatened by LA2028……...10

How to Support a Sustainable City Through an Alternative Games……..12
United Nations' Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities……....13
Culture……....16
Redefining Olympism……18
Festivals…….....19

Applying our Mission to LA28…….……..……21

Beyond LA 2028…….……..26

References…….28

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Abstract

Despite decades of attempted reform to address it's social, environmental and economic impact, the Olympic Games continue to show a pattern of reoffense and damage to its host cities. Since it's modern inception, the Games have been instrumental in suppressing political activism and causing infrastructural failure (including environmental degradation) within its host cities, threatening the well-being and health of the environment and community left behind after the closing ceremony. This paper highlights this troubled history and through the lens of an upcoming Olympics host city, Los Angeles, envisions a more sustainable, alternative event in place of the Olympic Games. Using the guidance of Goal 11: *Sustainable Cities and Communities* from the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, the influence of global cultural festivals and existing national sport initiatives, my proposed alternative, the Anti-Olympics Festival, sets out to imagine a more sustainable and resilient post-Games legacy for host cities, contrary to the devastation that followed former hosts of the Olympic Games.

There's Only One Olympics

There is truly no event like the Olympic Games.

Every four years, an estimated 206 countries and territories gather ~13,000 athletes and accompanying coaches to participate in the summer edition of this international competition (IOC, 2021). Established in 1896, the modern Games set out to quell international tensions and promote competition in lieu of war (Samuel, 2013; Lloyd, 2017). During the 1896 revival of the Games, the governing guidelines developed for the Games, the Olympic Charter, introduced a volunteer-led, non-profit committee called the International Olympics Committee, or IOC (IOC, 2012). The Olympic Charter states that the role of the IOC is 'to promote a positive legacy [for]... the host cities and host countries [of the Games]' (Samuel, 2013). The IOC supports this legacy through their philosophy for the Games otherwise known as *Olympism,* or placing "sport at the service of humankind" (International Olympics Committee, 2012). In accordance with this ideology, the IOC fulfills this "service" to humankind by way of the Olympic Games, an event whose power IOC President Thomas Bach describes as having the ability to, "promote health and help prevent (or even cure) the diseases of modern civilization" while also fostering cognitive development and supporting the integration of communities (International Olympic Committee, 2012).

Considering the immense platform awarded to the host city chosen to represent this international tradition, it's no wonder why some would consider it an honor to host the Games. Typically a 2-year process, cities undergo a bid for the title of host city broken down into two parts: the informal Invitation Phase and the more-formal Candidature Process. During this process, cities relay their vision for executing the widely-beloved event and assess the legal and financial resources they have to do so (International Olympics Committee, 2020a). Once crowned host city, the fanfare begins and city officials celebrate with grand displays of gratitude and promises to deliver an event their city can be proud of. After the announcement of Rio 2016, Brazilian President Lula de Silva expressed that the chance to host the Olympics was, "the greatest gift a president could wish for" (Kommenda, 2017). The pride that city officials take in hosting the Olympics illustrates the weight and responsibility that comes with hosting a

ceremony of such magnitude and potential reach. The Olympics doesn't just represent large scale, international unity; it also allows the chosen host city the opportunity to broadcast and celebrate their individuality and union as a city. By fostering the macro-level, international harmony integral to the vision of the Games, the Olympics subsequently inspire a similar sense of connectedness on a more intimate, community level. We, even as deeply-divided Americans, will always root for the small town American swimmer like Michael Phelps who represented America at just 15 years old or Gabby Douglas, the 16-year-old gymnast from Virginia. Through the Olympics, we develop an unmatched sense of patriotism that brings us together —even if it's just for 2 weeks. Through this lens, the Olympics is the escape we all seek from the harsh realities that lie outside of the stadiums and venues that house our Olympic heroes.

As spectators, we gain a lot from the Games: union, competition and celebration. The Games have also proven to generate a profit for organizers and city officials as well. But what's to gain for the residents of the host city? We've considered what the Olympics symbolize for us as viewers but not what they actually produce for the ordinary, working class people tasked with living alongside an event of this magnitude.

What if the Olympic Games, instead of providing refuge from the struggles of "modern civilization", actually *exemplify* the inequities already rampant in the communities where the Games take place? And —if anything— imparts long lasting, unsustainable economic and infrastructural pressure, resulting in environmental devastation; an impact that threatens not only the land but also the health and safety of the host city's inhabitants— and is sure to reoffend each and every future host city as long as the Games remain.

A History of Suppression, Displacement and Degradation

Despite the International Olympic Committee's declaration to promote prosperity within its host cities, the Games have proven to be a breeding ground for exploitation. Throughout it's 3,000 year history, the Olympic Games have been a contributory factor in silencing activism, the violent displacement of marginalized communities, and causing irreversible environmental harm.

A famous example of the Olympics' activism suppression is from the 1968 Mexico City Games where Tommie Smith and John Carlos (along with Peter Norman) were stripped of their medals after raising a black, gloved fist during the national anthem in protest of the racism they faced as Black athletes (Blakemore, 2021). If possible, acts of protest are blocked from viewers altogether: During the 2008 Beijing Games, pro-Tibet citizens were met with police brutality after taking center stage of the global torch relay to bring awareness to human rights violations in China (The Economist, 2020).

When protests aren't threatening the image of the Games, Olympics organizing committees fear that the visibility of homeless communities will compromise their carefully crafted image. To address this, organizers will dispatch law enforcement to perform "homeless sweeps" in the weeks before the opening ceremony (Chan, 2014). The Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) discovered that for the 2008 Summer Games, Beijing attempted to "beautify the city" in preparation for the Games by insisting that residents relocate from areas designated for Olympic venues (Samuels, 2013). A similar situation happened during the 2010 Vancouver Winter Games, only this time it was enforced by new legislation called the Assistance to Shelter Act (Chan, 2014). Dubbed by many the "Olympic kidnapping act", this piece of legislation allows enforcement "to bundle a homeless person into their cruiser and take them to a shelter" (Chan, 2014). These are not isolated incidents; city organizers in Atlanta cleared the streets for the 1996 Games by purchasing one-way bus tickets out of the city for homeless citizens and demanding they sign no-return privisons, legally barring anyone from returning to the area they once resided (Associated Press, 1996). These examples are indicative of the Olympics' long standing history of neglect and harassment towards their host city's most vulnerable communities.

The threat of the Olympic Games doesn't end at the displacement of vulnerable groups: The Games' history of generating record-breaking amounts of waste and causing irreversible damage to protected land also highlights the risk posed to communities tasked with hosting the Games. The 1984 Los Angeles Games alone produced 6.5 million pounds of trash in only 22 days (Los Angeles County, 2017). As it relates to development for the Games, construction for the 2014 Sochi Games famously disturbed animal migration territories and prevented access to drinkable water by illegally dumping waste (Jane, 2014; Redazione, 2020). As for Rio 2016, conditions of local waterways worsened with the presence of the Games, threatening to cause illness to anyone utilizing them (Redazione, 2020).

While the IOC still avoids affiliating with political movements, they have made ill-fated attempts to rectify their disappointing environmental footprint since adding "Environment" as a pillar of *Olympism* in 1994. In 2000, The Sydney Games promised to make environmentalism a focal point as the first official "Green Games" (Staff, 2017). Even with feats like successfully incorporating existing public transport to support the Games and a large reliance on renewable energy, Sydney couldn't deliver the "Green Games" they'd hoped to achieve. To start, the Sydney Games failed to meet its own environmental guidelines for air conditioning and refrigeration in Olympic venues —an oversight Greenpeace, a global, environmental activism group, called "the biggest and most systematic environmental failure of its Olympic Games" (Staff, 2017). This failure resulted in ozone depleting chemicals (linked to increased risk of skin cancer) being released into the venues. This is even more pressing for Australia, the country with the fastest growing rate of skin cancer in the world (World Cancer Research Fund, 2019). This unfortunately wasn't Sydney's only encounter with toxins pervading the Games: Sydney's Athlete's Village was located just one and half miles away from over half a million tons of dioxin-contaminated waste; a toxin linked to immune system impairment, cancer and skin lesions (Staff, 2017; WHO, 2016).

In the second attempt to execute a "Green Games", the 2012 London Games attempted to spearhead the first 100% public transport-accessible Games to address carbon emissions and worsening air quality as a result of Games-related traffic. Unfortunately, these plans were short

lived once the pre-existing transportation infrastructure was proven unfit to support both the public and the ~800,000 people visiting for the Games (Mair, 2012). The London Games also vowed to repurpose their developments like the Olympian village into “affordable housing” for the East London Boroughs, the working class neighborhood where it was built (Ponsford, 2017). Rather than providing stability, the East London borough saw a 60% increase in homelessness and emergency temporary accommodations for housing in the years since the Games (Ponsford, 2017). This can be attributed to the rising rents and insecure housing contracts placed on renters by the unregulated developers who became their landlords after the Games (Ponsford, 2017).

As the first Games to follow the international environmental agreement, the Paris Climate Accord, the 2016 Rio Games promised to make sustainability a priority; namely to avoid unnecessary construction and to prioritize renovations to existing venues to support resource-reuse (Russell, 2016). Despite being ISO 20121 certified (suggesting that the Rio Games met specific sustainability requirements to address its potential social, economic and environmental impact), the Rio Games fell short of a sustainable feat (Pierre-Louis, 2018). The Games not only oversaw the construction of a new, multi-acre golf course on a protected nature reserve but also greenlit the construction of a rail line that only supported transportation to Olympic venues, rendering it useless for the community post-games (Russell, 2016).

This brief history of the Games is important because it shows that even with attempted reform, the root of the issues remain. The Games continue to find themselves reoffending the communities and landscapes they vowed not only to protect, but to enrich. Despite the seemingly unavoidable devastation caused by the Games, the IOC shows no intention of stopping the Games —and from their perspective, why would they? The 1984 Los Angeles Games established the Olympics as a profitable resource for host cities and the IOC, generating a then-record breaking profit of $250 million (Walker, 2018). Decades later, the 2008 Beijing and 2014 Sochi Winter Games made $146 million and $53 billion, respectively (Reuters, 2009; Reuters, 2015). While the Games prove to be of financial benefit to the city’s Olympics organizing entities, the real cost comes at the expense of the residents of these cities who are left to live in the communities uprooted by the Games. The level of disruption the Olympics has on its host cities illustrates that to truly protect these communities and to support their prosperity, the Olympics,

as we know it, can no longer exist. This conclusion leaves us, a world in desperate need of unity and connectedness, with the void of a shared international tradition.

In response to this bind, my research sets out to reimagine what a *sustainable* alternative to the Olympic Games would look like, a version of the Games that uses its financial resources and wide reach to invest in the prosperity of its host cities by directly addressing the existing-needs of that city. The Olympics rarely —with the exception of introducing invasive development that ultimately leads to environmental degradation— introduces brand new issues for host cities to combat. The issues arise when the demands of the Olympic Games magnify and stoke the flames of *existing* social and economic tensions, adding an insurmountable amount of pressure that leads to irreversible destruction. Considering that amount of influence, how much good could the resources of the Olympic Games do —their international platform, funds etc.— if those resources were mobilized to address and resolve the existing tensions and issues present in their host cities? My research attempts to resolve how we can develop an alternative to the Olympics that refuses to compromise on the conditions necessary to make cities resilient and sustainable, while also preserving the qualities of Olympism: promoting international unity and providing much-needed escapism through shared tradition?

We can envision this potential for positive change by developing a case study for one of the upcoming host cities: Los Angeles, California. We will establish how an alternative to the projected LA28 Olympic Games can better support the community of Los Angeles. But first, let's establish the needs unique to Los Angeles and its residents while also considering its history with the Games to better understand how we can develop a more sustainable celebration.

How the Residents of Los Angeles are Threatened by LA28

For 2028, the city of Los Angeles has already committed to hosting a "reimagined" version of the Games (LA28, 2021). With a (familiar) commitment to utilizing a number of pre-existing facilities spanning across the ~40 miles that make up the city limits and their documented charitable acts (like investing $160 million to youth sports in Los Angeles before the opening

ceremony), the Games are making a visible and conscious effort to be low-impact and advantageous for the community (Lang, 2018; International Olympics Committee, 2019a).

But this is a city that has already seen the devastation that hosting the Olympics can bring. Dubbed the “Capitalist Games", LA84 was believed to be by then-Los Angeles mayor, Tom Bradley, “[An opportunity to] showcase for business, industry and culture, which would enhance our competitive posture in world trade and tourism,” (NOlmypicsLA, 2020). While this may have proved advantageous for the city's economy, the predominantly working class communities of color that lived near the Olympic venues had a different experience. Similar to Vancouver 2010, these areas saw the militarization of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) who were ordered under new legislation to “to sanitize the area” (Chandler, 2018). This led to dozens of homeless sweeps, resulting in unhoused residents being arrested or forced to relocate while their belongings were trashed (Chandler, 2018). This massive sweep was financially backed by a recently-increased operating cost of $525 million for the LAPD in 1982, which many speculate was introduced in preparation for the Games (Chandler, 2018; NOlympicsLA, 2020).

The promise of job creation and opportunity also proved to be a dead end for small businesses looking to profit from the tourism brought by the Games. In an attempt to address the issue of access and opportunity for entrepreneurs of color, the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee (LAOOC) contracted 23 minority licensees to be vendors at the Olympic Games (Reich, 1985). The LAOOC contractually guaranteed that their “big sponsors" would only purchase Olympic souvenirs from their licensees; they would grant the licensees space to market their products to the general public at Olympic venues and finally, that it would allow the licensees to sell to other distributors (Reich, 1985). The good faith displayed by providing this opportunity was short lived when smaller businesses were unknowingly undercut by unlicensed competition who were willing to supply the LAOOC with merchandise at a marked down price (Reich, 1985). With larger (unlicensed) groups allowed to compete with the smaller (licenced) businesses, it ultimately drew unfair competition and placed those with evident, pre-existing financial strain at an even bigger disadvantage against the more-experienced, wealthier competition. As a result, 14 of the minority licensees had to file for bankruptcy post-Games due

to the financial hit they took during their time as a vendor for the Games (NOlympicsLA, 2020). After 12 of the 23 licensees filed a suit against the LAOOC, the LAOOC continued to weaponize their wealth by delaying the legal proceeding in hopes of increasing legal expenses so the licensees would have to drop the suit (Reich, 1985). (Unfortunately, I cannot find the outcome of this suit).

The failure to honor the contractual agreement intended to provide access to already-marginalized groups flies in face of "service to humankind" and furthermore, challenges the notion that cities accept Olympic bids in an effort to support job creation and prosperity for the larger community. The LAOOC's history of mistreatment and betrayal towards the community of Los Angeles illustrates that the LA Games serve to profit the city and not to support the people.

Now over 30 years later, the residents of Los Angeles face similar threats as they once did in 84'. Homelessness has worsened with ~66,433 people living on the streets, a 12.7% increase from 2019 and the third year in a row there's been a record increase (Scott, 2020). A return to the position of host city would undoubtedly mean the return of aggressive, targeted sweeps of unhoused citizens in an effort to mask our ongoing homelessness crisis from the cameras of the Olympic Games. As recently as March 2021, Los Angeles has authorized devastating homeless sweeps amidst backlash in areas set to host venues like the Echo Park neighborhood of Los Angeles (Oreskes, 2021). Los Angeles' working class is experiencing a similar strain. As of October 2020, the Los Angeles Metropolitan area has the third highest unemployment rate in the country at 11% (US Bureau of Labor, 2020). While the Covid-19 pandemic has likely been a large contributor to this, 2019 saw the poverty rate at 18% for the city (U.S Census Bureau, 2020). The legacy of former Games (the working class East Borough Neighborhood in the London Games and the Atlanta 1996 Games) shows us that these existing-barriers to financial stability will only be exacerbated by the demands of the Olympic Games.

Our research into the history of Los Angeles and its relationship to the Olympic Games suggests that simply reforming unsustainable features of the Olympics —vowing to be "no-build" and licensing community members as official vendors— is not enough to prevent the

irreversible damage introduced by the Games. For the health and longevity of Los Angeles' community, their residents and infrastructure, the Olympics should not come to Los Angeles in 2028. With the history of the 1984 Games informing us of the broken promises and hardship that fell on the city of Los Angeles after the Games, it's important to determine the steps an alternative celebration should take to avoid a similar devastation.

How to Support a Sustainable City through an Alternative Games

With an understanding of Los Angeles' most vulnerable communities and how the Olympics has previously endangered them, we can establish how an alternative to the Games can approach supporting and uplifting the community of Los Angeles. To develop an alternative event to the Olympic Games, we need to create a mission statement that clearly outlines the goals and values of our proposed alternative. Additionally, it's important to consider what a "sustainable alternative" would even look like; will it still be a 2-week long competition? How is this alternative an improvement from the original Games? By understanding what makes a "sustainable city" and how we can use the cultural and environmental landscape of Los Angeles to fulfill that, we can reimagine the Olympic Games, and more specifically LA28, to be an event in service to the social, economic and environmental well-being of its host city.

To start, let's establish that a sustainable alternative to the Olympics should only exist to serve its host city, rather than to generate a profit for private organizing committees. This principle is contrasted to the Olympic Games, whose early bidding process assesses what the *host city* can provide for the Games (ensuring the legal, financial and infrastructural framework to support the needs of the event) rather than what the organizing committee and its resources can do for the host city (IOC 2020a). This means that the funds raised by the organizing committee of our alternative event should not be designated to renovate venues and decorate elaborate opening ceremonies, but rather to fund the prosperity and improvement of the host city by addressing its most pressing needs (e.g. clean water, arts programs, access to internet etc.). These unique needs will vary depending on the potential host city so the alternative organizing committee will be tasked with determining which potential host city is most in need of service and support through the terms of our mission statement.

This assessment can take place during the timeframe of the original Games' Candidature process —but rather than evaluating the resources that potential host cities have to execute the demands of the Olympic Games, the organizing members for our alternative will look to equip our crowned host city with resources that will support their social, economic and environmental sustainability.

As was previously stated, this support will be guided through the terms of our mission statement. To form our mission statement, we will need to look at the ways in which we can be in service to the prosperity and sustainability of host cities.

United Nations' Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

Initially intended to outline the necessary social and infrastructural action needed to fight climate change, the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer 17 initiatives that can also serve to fulfill the goals of an alternative to the Games: an event dedicated to helping cities become more sustainable and in turn, healthier and more resilient. Through these 17 goals, the SDGs strive to end inequality and poverty worldwide. Among these goals are detailed initiatives that outline the steps necessary to ensure adequate and sustainable living for people worldwide. The SDGs highlight that "sustainability" as a concept encompasses more than just recycling and green spaces. The SDGs broadened scope of what it means to be sustainable considers social and economic factors to be just as impactful to sustainability as the more traditional, physical environment-centered components. By emphasizing the intersections of environmentalism through initiatives like Goal 3, "Good Health and Well Being", or Goal 8, "Decent Work and Economic Growth", we can broaden our understanding of sustainability and how to approach a successful sustainable alternative to the Games. (United Nation, 2019).

With the number of people living in cities projected to rise to 5 billion by 2030, Goal 11 of the SDGs calls for the development of "Sustainable Cities and Communities" (SCC) (United Nations, 2019). Research from the UN Environment program highlights the role that urban living has in sustainability efforts, citing the "strong link" between the quality of life in cities and how

those cities manage the natural resources available to them (UN Environment, 2018). The mission of SCC is to improve residential and community-based sectors by "[Making] cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable" (United Nations, 2019). To fulfill the mission of Sustainable Cities and Communities, the United Nations specifies ten key features in the form of targets that represent crucial areas necessary to address in pursuit of accomplishing a sustainable city and community, as seen in the table below (United Nations, 2019).

Table 1: Targets of the UN's Plan for Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

Target 11.1: Safe and Affordable Housing	By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums.
Target 11.2: Affordable and Sustainable Transportation Systems	By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons.
Target 11.3: Inclusive and Sustainable Urbanization	By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries.
Target 11.4: Protect the World's Cultural and Natural Heritage	Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage. This focuses on conversation of natural landscapes and maintaining biodiversity of areas.

Target 11.5: Reduce the Adverse Effects of Natural Disasters	By 2030, significantly reduce the number of deaths and the number of people affected and substantially decrease the direct economic losses relative to global gross domestic product caused by disasters, including water-related disasters, with a focus on protecting the poor and people in vulnerable situations. This requires infrastructural support and improvement for sustainable cities.
Target 11.6: Reduce the Environmental Impact of Cities	By 2030, reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management.
Target 11.7: Provide Access to Safe and Inclusive Green and Public Spaces	By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities.
Target 11A: Strong National and Regional Development Planning	Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning.
Target 11B: Implement Policies for Inclusion, Resource Efficiency and Disaster Risk Reduction	By 2020, substantially increase the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, resilience to disasters, and develop and implement, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, holistic disaster risk management at all levels.

Target 11C: Support Least Developed Countries in Sustainable and Resilient Buildings	Support least developed countries, including through financial and technical assistance, in building sustainable and resilient buildings utilizing local materials.

These 10 targets can be boiled down to three central themes: the importance of accessibility, the consideration of at-risk and vulnerable populations and the preservation of the natural environment that makes up that city. These three features can greatly inform the foundation for our alternative to the Olympic Games. Our brief history of the Games illustrates the many threats that the Games can pose to a host city. Among those threats are the very issues Goal 11 sets out to address: displacement and housing insecurity (Targets 1 and 3), the disenfranchisement of vulnerable populations (Targets B, C), and the destruction of the natural environment (Targets 4, 6 and 7). The three, overarching guiding principles of Goal 11 provide a framework by which we can begin to develop a more sustainable alternative to the Olympic Games. The promotion of access to quality living, attention to the most vulnerable and a respect for environmental heritage are all themes that need to be established into our mission for an alternative Games.

Culture

As we search for accessible ways to inspire a sustainable city through an alternative to the Olympics, it's important that we consider cultural recognition as an integral part of these efforts. Similar to the United Nations' SDGs to address climate change, the Committee on Culture is a

subgroup within the World Organization of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG); a network of cities dedicated to developing programs and policies that center culture as a means to achieve a sustainable city (UCLG, 2021). The mission of the Committee on Culture is "to promote culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development through the international dissemination and the local implementation of *Agenda 21 for culture*" (UCLG, 2021). *Agenda 21 for culture* is a document that aims to foster cultural development by ensuring that city governments worldwide commit to issues like human rights, sustainability and ultimately, cultural diversity (UCLG, 2021). This applied emphasis on culture is founded on the principle that culturally-informed development (be it development of a large scale event like the Olympics or of a new hotel) ensures efficient and useful development (Duxbury, 2016). Culture is "a means through which citizens feel they belong to their city" making it an incredibly powerful tool in its ability to transform a citizen's sense of self and their overall comfort. Because of this impact, the involvement and recognition of that culture in development can have a positive impact on how citizens engage with their environment. (Duxbury, 2016). In their research of culture and its influence on sustainable systemic change, the UCLG finds that "local cultural resources encourage systemic social and economic change, [enhancing] local resiliency and potential" (Duxbury, 2016). These resources with the potential to enhance local potential and engagement can come in the form of culturally relevant buildings, landscapes or artifacts (NRCS, 2021). Additionally, cultural activities and means of expression encourage a greater understanding, improving knowledge and empowering citizens to be active in the political and economic processes that make up their communities (Duxbury, 2016). Aside from inspiring political and economic engagement, their research also found that cultural actions and expressions can "catalyze environmental reclamation processes and inspire actions to improve environmental health, [while enhancing] social connections with the ecosystems of local places" (Duxbury, 2016). Supporting this testament to the influence of culture in sustainability efforts, the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network found that among physical well-being, social and cognitive skills, science and technology, "culture and the arts" was a key component in the framework of learning that influenced effective participation in economic and political life (UN-SDSN, 2013).

Not only can cultural expressions and recognition bring individuals within a local community together, but displays of cultural heritage can also help to foster understanding and social cohesion on an international level. The *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* developed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) states that in response to our growing differences, "it is essential to ensure harmonious interaction among people and groups with plural, varied and dynamic cultural identities…" (UNESCO, 2020). This engagement with differing and "varied" cultural identities can be facilitated by platforming cultural expressions on an international stage. These expressions can be in the form of local activism art or other forms of artistic expression intended to express culture and bring light to our potential differences. Through these cultural expressions, we can spark intercultural dialogues with the potential to mend and repair international tensions. Intercultural dialogue involves the "sharing of ideas and differences with the intent of developing a deeper understanding of different perspectives and practices" (United Nations, 2020). Beyond facilitating conversations that can heal and unite, intercultural dialogues can also "create an environment conducive to sustainable development" (United Nations, 2020). By using artistic cultural expression, we have an opportunity to accomplish something that sports or competition alone could not provide; instead of placing our differences aside for the sake of competition, we can bring light to our differences and find common understanding through the acknowledgement of our respective cultures and through the dialogues that those expressions introduce. Because of the influence that cultural expression and recognition has on inspiring more sustainable engagement from its community members, it's important that cultural heritage and expression is a key feature of a sustainable alternative to the Games.

Redefining Olympism

As we look to replace the long-standing event of the Olympic Games, it's important to note that there is a feature of the original Games worth preserving. The ideology of *Olympism*— to utilize the power of sport to unite and to serve communities through competition— is not the issue at hand; it's the damage that cities sustain while fulfilling the inherently resource-exhaustive and exploitative demands of the Olympic Games; the anti-poor sentiments that's displaced unhoused populations since the modern era of the Games; the activist

suppression displayed in Mexico City, Rio and Beijing. Sports alone are not the source of the division that the Olympics so often creates. Maintaining a focus on sport as a means to unite people actually has positive implications, especially in terms of promoting financial accessibility. In a sample of over 3,000 teenage participants, research found that once engagement in sport is introduced, socioeconomic status is not a "critical [determinant]" of the depth of engagement or success that child has in that sport (Eime, 2015). This indicates that from an early age, class is not a decisive factor in any child's achievement in recreational sport, making it an accessible experience across class divides.

Olympism's potential to unite through sport despite class lines is a promising addition to our efforts towards a more conscious, inclusive and sustainable alternative to the Olympics. But it's important that we expand the ways in which we can be at the "service to humankind" for our alternative. Our research into what makes for a sustainable and united community shows us that sports is not the only lens through which we can find hope and inspire engagement within communities. We found that by allowing the opportunity for cultural expression, establishing a focus on accessibility, protecting at-risk populations and the environment, we can take a more holistic approach to supporting and "serving" the host cities of our proposed alternative; encouraging a more united and prosperous city with the potential to inspire healthier international relationships.

Because of this, the mission statement for our proposed alternative Olympics will reimagine the terms of "Olympism". Instead of "placing sport at the service of humankind", the guiding ideology for an alternative will be to "to platform the host city, its culture, landscape and community, with the intention to stimulate cultural, infrastructural and environmental improvement and development".

Festivals

Now that we've established our mission statement, what will this look like in practice? For one, a sustainable alternative cannot maintain the framework of an international gathering. For sporting events like the Olympics, there's approximately 3 million spectators in attendance, producing an estimated 2000 miles for each person (Triantafyllidis, 2018). Accounting for the sport teams,

employees, and volunteers, the Games generate 120,000 tons of CO2 emissions from travel alone (Triantafyllidis, 2018). To be an environmentally-conscious alternative, we cannot host an event that requires international travel. Our proposed alternative needs to focus on the local community and with that, center the culture of that community rather than a competition between nations. Additionally, we've found that the intercultural dialogue and platforming of cultural expression allows us the opportunity to connect beyond our immediate communities and reach into global communities (United Nations, 2020). Because of this opportunity, it's unnecessary to gather millions of people from different parts of the world in the name of fostering international unity. Needless travel would be counter-productive to our mission of encouraging a sustainable environment for host cities and is ultimately, not necessary to ensure international unity.

To realize our mission to inspire resilience and systemic change through community outreach (Goal 11), cultural expression and sport, festivals provide the platform to achieve all three goals. Festivals have the power to challenge and recontextualize cities and their prominence to culture and environmentalism: "At their best," writes researchers at the University of Sheffield, " [festivals] perform a transformative role in society, celebrating traditions and powerfully expressing the meanings that places hold for people" (Perry, 2019). These engaged displays of culture and belonging can take place in streets, pubs, railway arches, houses, boats and doorsteps. These are areas the UCLG would call "cultural resources" with the "potential to enhance local potential and engagement" and to help residents "explore different ways of belonging in cities" (Duxbury, 2016; Perry, 2019). This celebration of communal space and culture helps to address Goal 11 by providing a way in which we can visualize and accept an urban environment as an environmental landscape. Festivals can also provide the space to introduce the intercultural dialogues we discussed are necessary to foster international unity and understanding. Take the Cape Town Carnival, which was once planned alongside the FIFA World Cup in 2010. It's intentionally planned around their Emancipation Day — the day on which the slaves were freed in South Africa in the 1830s (coincidentally also at the start of the New Year) (Mason, 2017). Despite the city's economic disparity and political disputes concerning the stories celebrated during the event, the Cape Town Carnival often displays thought-provoking performance art (Fig.1) that addresses the inequities rampant throughout their culture and city (Perry, 2019). The parade portion predominantly features their working class

“coloured community”, who are described as indigenous African peoples and descendants primarily from slaves and political exiles that Dutch and British colonizers brought to South Africa (Mason 2017). Our research shows us that their platforming of not only cultural expression but also of their working class communities and their history provides space for the transformative and impactful dialogues to take place among their divided community.

Another example of using culture to bring awareness and knowledge through the format of a festival (specifically environmental activism) is the Got Ramogi festival in Kisumu City, Kenya. This event was created to “preserve and protect the traditional culture, sacred sites and myths of the Got Ramogi people” (Perry, 2019). Those same organizers in Kisumu City collaborated with a nearby university to coordinate “Dunga Fish Night”, a community-organized festival intended to address biodiversity threats to the wetlands, the loss of traditional fishing industries and concern about deforestation, quarrying and urbanisation (Perry, 2019).



Fig.1 Cape Town Performance Art titled, “ Infecting the City”
Africa Centre/Wikimedia Commons

With examples of how community-led festivals can successfully platform culture, while also highlighting evident class disparities and encouraging local environmental education, the format of a festival is clearly well equipped to support our mission statement.

Applying our Mission to LA28

Now, how do we apply our established mission to the unique, cultural and environmental landscape of Los Angeles? To determine that, we need to revisit Los Angeles' specific needs:

For Los Angeles, we need an event that emphasizes the diverse landscape of their 4 million residents (U.S Census Bureau, 2019). Los Angeles's population is ~48% Latinx/Hispanic, ~11% Asian and ~8% black, making it one of the most diverse cities in the country (U.S Census Bureau, 2021; Wells, 2016). LA County also has one of the country's highest homeless rates, with a disproportionate amount being made up of black residents who make up less than 10% of the city's total population (Scott, 2020; U.S Census Bureau). In late 2020, a University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) study found that in addition to the current ~60,000 unhoused people in Los Angeles, another 36,000 people could be evicted and subsequently homeless in LA County due to the on-going COVID-19 pandemic. These are the social, economic and (ultimately) environmental concerns that our alternative, the Anti-Olympics Festival-LA, should attempt to address in our reframing of LA28.

The benefit of tackling these issues in a city like Los Angeles with an unfortunate history of wealth disparity, limited access and housing insecurity is that there is a plethora of existing programs who have spent years — if not, decades— dedicated confronting these issues. Instead of reinventing the wheel, the Anti-Olympics Festival LA can help platform the city's diversity, the wealth disparities evident in that diversity and address the rampant homeless epidemic by providing the Olympic stage —a platform typically reserved for the Games and their athletes —to instead uplift and support existing community-led groups and initiatives dedicated to alleviating and eliminating these threats to adequate life in Los Angeles.

In terms of addressing the vast diversity of Los Angeles, LA28 has plans to make this a central theme of the upcoming Games (LA28, 2021). The Chief Marketing Officer of LA28, Amy Gleeson expressed in a promotional interview how Los Angeles' culture of "unapologetic creativity" and inclusion makes the creative input of the city really important (LAOOC, 2020). This importance was addressed when LA28 began a campaign allowing for residents to design their own version of the LA28 logo, culminating in a select 35 submissions rotating as the

"official logo" for the Games (Juliano, 2020). Glesson states, "Los Angeles is an infinite canvas that represents millions of people and hundreds of languages, the best way to showcase the LA28 Games is by asking the community to share in the creation" (LAOOC, 2020). Rather than directing collective, creative input towards promotional material for the Olympics, a way to truly be at the service of Los Angeles - its culture and residents- is by helping to platform existing programs dedicated to culture, diversity and artistic expression.

The Los Angeles Department for Arts and Culture's *Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative* (CEII) addresses just that by improving access to art by diversifying art spaces (LACAC, 2021). A part of the accomplishments of this initiative is their funding and expansion of art internships, specifically in an effort to improve access to art despite financial and racial disparities. This is in response to the steady decrease that Los Angeles Public schools have seen in arts funding, specifically in districts that serve predominantly Latinx and Black students (Study International, 2016). To platform the students involved in the CEII, the Anti-Olympics Festival-LA could hold a ceremony to display the art of local students involved in this internship. This provides an opportunity for the exchange of culture and varied expressions of what it's like to be an artist (or an artist of color) in Los Angeles. This type of event is no stranger to Olympic viewers, specifically in Los Angeles. Director Robert Fitzpatrick, then-President of the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), debuted *The Olympic Arts Festival* during the LA84 Games. The goal of the festival was to showcase international art and performance communities and because of that, they failed to represent the diversity of the host city in their artistic expression (Lloyd, 2017). Instead of centering European art as they did in '84, the Anti-Olympics Festival could platform projects from the Los Angeles Department of Arts and Culture like The Creative Graffiti Abatement Project, where 4 neighborhoods in south Los Angeles collaborated with local libraries to contribute civic artwork in an effort to inspire artistic expression and address graffiti vandalism in the city; or the department's partnership with the Native American Indian Commission to produce artwork in response to the November 2018 removal of the Columbus Statue at Grand Park, downtown Los Angeles (Fig 2).



Fig 2. *Memory is in the Present*

Photo by: Los Angeles Dept of Arts and Culture/Mercedes Dorame.

Aside from visual arts, Los Angeles has no shortage of programs dedicated to the intersection of the environment and activism. To stimulate the intercultural dialogue we saw in the 2010 Cape Town Carnival and Got Ramogi Festival, it's important that we address the fragmented and suffering racial history and modern day disparities rampant in the city of Los Angeles. The Olympics and its former venues for previous Games are no stranger to the protests of racial discrimination within the city of Los Angeles. Neighboring the esteemed University of Southern California (USC) is the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, an Olympic favorite, having held the opening ceremony in both the LA 1932 and 1984 Olympics (LA Coliseum, 2019). This wealthy university and its accompanying stadium is located in one of the most impoverished neighborhoods in Los Angeles, making it one of the most glaring examples of wealth disparity in the city. Exposition Park comprises a predominantly Latinx immigrant population, with ~56% of residents originating from El Salvador and Mexico and ~38% being Black Americans (LA Times, 2019). Over a quarter of Exposition Park's residents live under the poverty line, more than double the rate of California and the national average (Census Reporter, 2019). Also a part of Exposition Park's history is the 1992 Los Angeles riots, the culmination of generations-long police brutality against the Black and Brown neighborhoods in LA that was sparked by the beating of Rodney King (Miranda, 2017). The riots were famously brought to the steps of USC and the LA Coliseum, requiring the National Guard to be dispatched (Azaarakhsh, 2012).

As our research suggests, intercultural dialogues and outreach can greatly shift tensions and help to work towards reconciliation for impacted communities. One Los Angeles-based group that works towards stimulating that change is Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation - Los Angeles (TRHT-LA). TRHT-LA is the Los Angeles chapter of a national organization that hosts seminars and events dedicated to addressing the issues that divide Los Angeles residents (TRHT-LA, 2021). For example, their series "Awake to Woke to Work: Building a Race Equity Culture", addresses the impact of structural racism in the philanthropic and nonprofit sector while "Keepers of Ancestral Medicine', highlights what it means to "remember, reclaim, actively integrate, and sustain ancestral medicine as crucial components" to our ability to self sustain on this planet (TRHT-LA, 2021). Considering the communities that are uprooted by the presence of the original Games and how the loss of not only culture follows the Games but also the loss of land and resources, the aforementioned seminars (or ones like it) led by TRHT-LA would be a great addition to our Anti-Olympics Festival-LA. These are conversations that can help to progress not only community level relationships in Los Angeles but would also serve to catalyze relevant, larger conversations if given the international stage typically afforded to the Olympic Games.

Sports are still an important part of using accessible means to unite cities like Los Angeles. Los Angeles' vibrant sports programs and initiatives provides no shortage of opportunities to inspire culture and competition. In response to the new-found attention to racial discrimination during the summer of 2020, 11 Los Angeles-based sports teams formed an initiative called the ALLIANCE, dedicated to addressing the intersection between sport and social justice (NBA, 2020). In partnership with the ALLIANCE, the Play Equity Fund is another group dedicated to funding and scaling effective and impactful programs, including school-based sports, coaching education, infrastructure development and juvenile justice programs (NBA, 2020). Ironically, these groups exist under the guidance of the LA84 Foundation, one of the community programs created with a share of the surplus from the original 1984 Games (Koga, 2020). Despite these ties to the original Games, these groups have a genuine opportunity to support youth sports and facilitate life-changing opportunities for athletes in Los Angeles. Students in juvenile programs and other groups that work to reform young adults on a struggling path can use programs like the Play Equity Fund to support their efforts towards a more stable

and adequate life. The Anti-Olympics Festival-LA can use it's platform to feature scrimmages between aspiring professional athletes in these programs to give them the exposure and experience of an international audience. Another group who could greatly benefit from this opportunity is the National Coalition for the Homeless and their athletes in The Street Soccer USA Cup. This self-described "sports for social change event" features homeless youth and adults from 16 cities across the country participating in local programs and scrimmages (National Coalition for the Homeless, n.d). The programs help them set personal and sports-related goals while also connecting athletes to job training, education, and other specialized programs. The Anti-Olympics Festival-LA can coordinate with Los Angeles-based chapters of the National Coalition for the Homeless to bring together unhoused athletes from different corner of Los Angeles County and work to facilitate practices and a scrimmage leading up to the Festival to provide them the opportunity to showcase the athletic ability they otherwise wouldn't get the chance to display.

Attention to the robust diversity of Los Angeles, it's untapped potential for athletic talent and the facilitation of overdue conversations with the potential to heal long standing racial division can all be a starting point to making Los Angeles a more sustainable city.

Beyond LA28

Los Angeles is very clearly the focus of this project; it's close to me as a Los Angeles native and as a budding activist within the community. Because of that connection and its rich history with the Games, Los Angeles took center-stage in this evaluation of degradation and how it can be avoided in the future —or possibly, turned into something advantageous for the larger community.

The grassroots organization, NOlympicsLA was a great inspiration to me in this project. NOlympics LA was started by the Housing & Homelessness committee of the Los Angeles chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America in 2017 (NOlympics, n.d). It started with identifying what the barriers to adequate life were for the unhoused citizens of Los Angeles and ended with members making the link between the seemingly inescapable cycle of homlessness in

Los Angeles and the exploitative nature of the Olympic Games. This approach greatly influenced how I developed my assessment of the Olympics and its potential impact on Los Angeles in the projected 2028 Games. This required me to take a step back to look at the "bigger picture" of what factors influence and potentially degrade a city. How are we using the resources around us? Are we using them responsibly and for whose benefit? This multifaceted issue makes for an interesting assessment through the lens of sustainability. The Olympics and its impact on host cities is the perfect example of the varying threats to environmentalism. It highlights the greed from the Olympic Organizing Committee; The indirect costs that residents are tasked with resolving when their waterways are polluted by the nearby abandoned Olympian village. The Olympic Games and all its grandeur, in many ways, is indicative of our tendency to ignore the first R of the *Reduce, Reuse, Recycle* mantra. We, as a collective humanity, cannot keep relying on "reuse" and "recycling" as a way to avoid confronting the damage we bring to communities and to natural landscapes with our overconsumption and overdevelopment. Simply reusing old venues to support a juggernaut of an event like the Olympics or using recycling material in our development of a new, resource-exhaustive stadium is no longer an acceptable response to "put out the fires" we've caused to the social and environmental fabric of the communities hosting the olympics: we need to stop setting fires to begin. It's my hope that this assessment illustrates the importance of looking at the bigger picture and considering at-risk communities and accessibility as it pertains to the traditions we know and love.

In terms of how it could be applied outside of Los Angeles, I believe that the candidature process that was reimagined to assess and address the needs of the host city can be applied to cities nationwide; addressing the specific need of the city based on its financial and ethnic demographic, environmental and social history and existing programs in place to address those needs. While this project is geared towards Los Angeles, every city has their version of a festival that highlights their unique stories and complicated past; and it's important that these are the elements considered when asking how to ensure the city's development and prolonged success.

Just as the IOC found the pillars of Olympism - "excellence, friendship and respect"- to be universal and relevant to nations globally, our philosophy for the Anti-Olympics Festival —accessibility through infrastructure, attention to vulnerable populations and the preservation of

culture and environment— are just as pertinent and integral to the success of any community striving towards a healthier and more sustainable city (IOC, 2020b). Those are rights belonging to every city in the world. While the conditions and goals of the Anti-Olympics Festival may seem ambitious— and at some points, utopic— it provides insight on how to use the resources once weaponized against vulnerable communities (like Los Angeles) to serve and fulfill these communities. The Olympic Games have spent the last 120 years exploiting communities and repackaging their demise as an opportunity for economic growth and potential while centering a false narrative of facilitating international harmony. It's time that we redefine what it means to be "at the service of humankind".

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