

# The olympic villages and the gigantism of the Games

by professor Dagoberto Ortensi



*In issue No. 44 of the "Olympic Review" we presented a study of the Olympic Villages. Today we publish an article on the same subject by Professor Dagoberto ORTENSI, of the school of engineers of the Aquila University (Italy).*

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*group for sports constructions of the International Architects Union. (Gruppo di lavoro impianti sportivi dell'unione internazionale), where he is in charge of the relations with the International Olympic Committee. We shall now let him speak.*

It is well known that the Olympic Village has always been one of the basic facilities for the great quadrennial youth festival. Even in ancient times, during the three weeks before the Olympic Games, the athletes would live and train together in Olympia. They were moved by the desire to compete to the end with their adversaries for the modest olive leaf crown, the symbol of victory and peace among men.

In 1896, in Athens, the Organising Committee, while welcoming the athletes in a memorable way, did not worry about their accommodations, a problem which, even at that time, was of a basic importance.

In 1908, in London, a center was set up to research the housing situation, and give out the addresses of hotels or individuals wishing to accommodate the athletes and their companions comfortably.

In 1912, in Stockholm, a commission was charged with rating the residences, and with dividing them amongst the delegations of the various countries, according to the facilities provided in certain schools, hotels or boarding houses.

In 1920, in Antwerp, even though it was not decided to build an urban complex, rationally designed and organized to house the athletes and technicians, the idea of setting up an Olympic Village began to take shape.

In 1923, during a meeting in Rome, the Executive Board of the International Olympic Committee (I.O.C.) clearly defined the idea conceived at Antwerp, and stated: *"The Organising Committee for the Olympic Games must provide the athletes with housing and all the necessary services, at a contractual daily price. price will be fixed each time;*

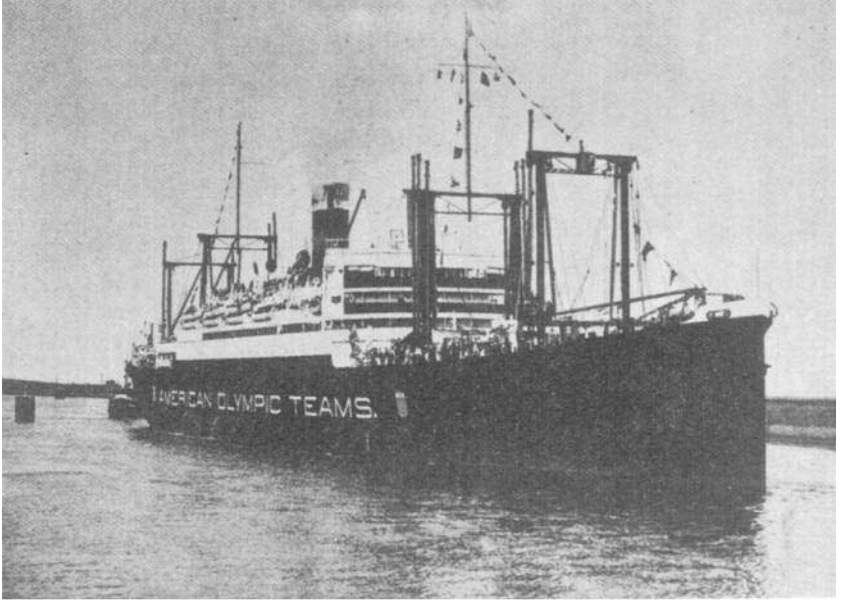
*the expenses will be assumed by the nations participating in the Games."*

In 1924, during the Olympic Games of Paris, the first example of collective housing for athletes and accompanying persons was realized in Colombes: small wooden buildings of one story each, equipped with three bedrooms, two wash basins, running water, and showers.

In Amsterdam, 1928, the idea of collective housing was set aside. A group of schools had been furnished, but a number of athletes found this solution uncomfortable. The representatives of the United States were accommodated on board the *"President Roosevelt"*, those from Italy on board the *"Solunto"*. These ships were anchored in the harbour of the Dutch city.

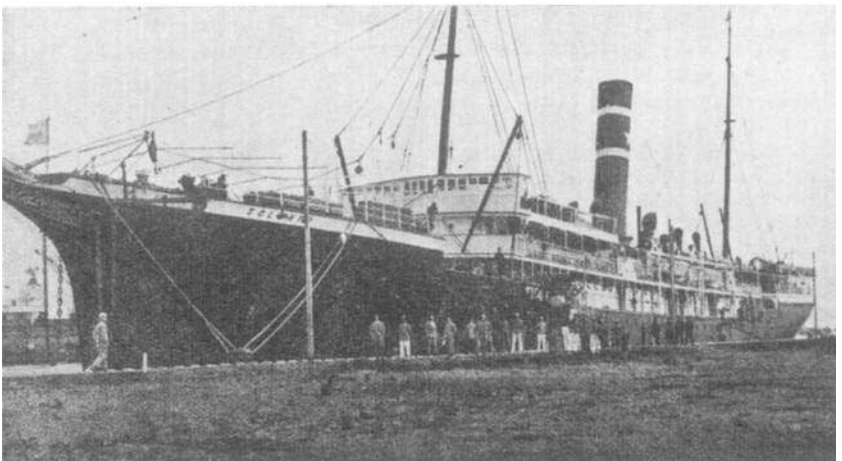
In 1932, in Los Angeles, the solution of a collective village was definitely adopted, and thus returned, in a modern way, the value of the example set in Olympia.

However, though interesting, the American example had to bear the consequences of its provisional character. As a matter of fact, actual quarters were built, and the whole complex suffered from the exaggerated spreading of the housing units. The excessive remoteness and the complete lack of open areas were a great trial for the



*The "President Roosevelt"*

*The "Salunto"*





*Los Angeles - Aerial view of the Olympic Village*

athletes and their companions. As they all said, it was "unbearable."

The rational distribution of the buildings, as planned by the organisers, had disastrous results: a surface which was too large - nearly 93 hectares, and an exasperatingly dull location, due partly to the character of the ground - completely flat.

But the lack of green areas was the major mistake of this "provisional work": the athletes had vast training areas at their disposal, but as soon as they were back in their one-story houses, the heat was quite unbearable.

On the contrary, perhaps because it was located far from the inhabited center (16 km. from the center of town and 15 km. from the

Olympic Stadium), the village at Berlin in 1936 had the advantage of being situated within a park full of high trees.

The number of small houses (450) in Los Angeles was reduced to 194 one-story cement dwellings. There were three types, with 16, 20 or 24 beds.

The village, spread over 64 hectares, was equipped with remarkable sports facilities: gymnasium, swimming pools, stadium.

In 1948 in London, after the Second World War, the athletes and companions were accommodated in schools (1) prepared for that purpose.

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*1. The women athletes were housed in London hotels.*



*Helsinki - Village for the women athletes*

In 1952, in Helsinki, the Village had to adapt to the disastrous consequences of the war: to accommodate the athletes, and after the Games, to provide lodging for those who needed it.

545 flats, 1630 rooms, and 4800 beds, were built for the urban complex, and furnished. The classrooms of two schools were also used for evening parties, movie performances, meetings... The 30 bed hospital of the Village was set up in the nursery school. An important element: the Kapila Sports Park, which contains, among other things, five football lawn grounds and a light athletics field, was located near the houses.

In 1956, the Olympic Village in Melbourne was built on a 47 hectare surface (93 in Los Angeles). But, green areas were almost forgotten, as were training facilities. The housing consisted of 320 prefabricated small houses (in Berlin, the number was reduced to 194) with 2 or 3 floors each, and two flats per floor: in all there were 847 units and 6260 beds.

The Olympic Village of Rome, in 1960, was focused on the "essential needs," and built with nearly insufficient means. Conceived with a double purpose, it was designed according to an urban plan, aimed at using only a very small surface:

35 hectares. The 171 buildings built on pile foundations, did not break the continuity of the grounds, which thus remained at the disposal of the athletes, during the Games, and of the people who now inhabit it.

The Tokyo Village was said, perhaps a little too harshly, to be like a "war surplus" item: its 60 hectare surface had served to accommodate the families of the American soldiers based in Japan immediately after the war. Numerous buildings arranged as housing for the athletes, date from that time. The Village contained 265 buildings, among which there were 14 with 4 floors, and 250 wooden ones with 1 or 2 floors.

For obvious reasons, the Tokyo Village had none of the characteristics to which we have alluded. It was, in fact, an instance where everything revealed its temporary character, it was destined to be demolished.

One could address reasonable and objective criticism to the Tokyo municipality, which did not take into account the role of the Village, and which favoured the urban development of the city.

More than 1 billion 860 million Swiss francs will be spent on the construction of roads, sec-

ondary arrangements, and sports equipment. The latter were carried out with the most advanced architecture and technique.

In short, the Tokyo Village, in no way, contributed to the evolution of Olympic Villages.

The numerous rooms, often converted corridors, contained up to 4 beds. The numerical distribution of services was shown to be inadequate. Only the abundance of open spaces and high quality training grounds satisfied the athletes and technicians.

In regard to the Olympic Games, it is not too bold to state that the 1964 Tokyo Games were rather the visible glorifying of the economic, technological and political factors, than of the human, educational and cultural values which are the basis of the Olympic Movement.

The realisation of the Village in Mexico in 1968 has been amply discussed. Its surface was hardly 30 hectares. It consisted of 29 buildings of 6 to 10 stories, and had 10,000 beds, in 904 apartments, each having 3 bedrooms. The village produced in this way, an atmosphere of urbanism. Still, during the official visit, the rooms were found to be too small.



*Mexico*

*Sapporo*



In 1972 in Sapporo (Japan) for the Winter Games, the Village, situated in the Makomana? area, contained groups of living quarters distributed in buildings of 5 stories. It could lodge 1500 people (athletes and companions).

The Village in Munich, in 1972, anticipated to hold more than 12,000 people (a small city) wishes, among other things, to constitute an example of a dwelling-complex characteristic of urban life, a very flexible organisation which, after the Games, could be adapted to other uses.

After this brief analysis, one realises that the Olympic Villages have taken on more and more importance, because they have the tendency, because of their dual purpose, to create an urban reality of functionalism, of rationality, and of architectural aesthetics unique in its field.

If the right equilibrium between the contingent necessities and utilisation after the Games could be found, the Villages would become excellent examples of a perfect solution to an ancient problem: self-sufficiency of dwelling complexes, endowed with all the necessities of community life, and including sports facilities.

But this has not been produced, and will only be produced imperfectly.

According to our analysis, it is obvious that in Melbourne, in Rome, in Tokyo and in Mexico, we continued on the same path as in Helsinki. It will be the same in Munich for the XXth Olympiad, and perhaps in Montreal in 1976.

It is an appropriate time now to attack a realistic subject, which will be the topic of our conclusion, and which has been much discussed during the last five years.

In theory, any municipality in the world with good sporting facilities, with the ability to house the athletes, and having a certain amount of available funds, could present itself as a candidate to the International Olympic Committee for the Olympic Games as well as for the Winter Games.

It is therefore evident that one must reply to the present gigantism with modest Olympic Games, but these must be impeccable in their organisation and judicious utilisation of equipment and services - based on the principle that the success of the Games is a function of the participation of the athletes and, above all, their joy in meeting each other, and of being united after the Games.

If this is not the case, the Olympic Games will soon

suffocate these values, which formed the basis of the peaceful coexistence, which Pierre de COUBERTIN always defended.

In this area, the architects have a certain responsibility; they must hear the call of alarm and, preserve with the organisers, the understanding that, if the quadrennial festival needs lively and beautiful works, from an aesthetic point of view, functional, simple, and economic in their management after the Games, they must also change the structures, because it is evident that the unique protagonist of the Games must be the athlete. Consequently, the policy of the officials of an Olympiad must not be concerned solely with the success of the event.

Such policy must foresee the future and effective use by the resident population of all the facilities, and one must not be forced to see the phenomenon of irregular and partial use of the sports installations, for various reasons. Among the most important one may cite the lack of foresight in the choice of location, the size, and, above all, the excessive cost.

Following the Rome Games, their gigantism gave rise to discussions about the survival of the Games. The reasons are varied:

- the number of participating countries.
- the logical increase in sport events (one may count them by dozens).
- the enormous costs of equipment, lodging, services (Probably in 1972, Munich will spend 2 billion 524 million Swiss francs).

- political interference, always more evident, which tends to control the world-wide gathering of youth.

These are good reasons for a radical change in the conception of the Games.

After Montreal, it is easy to forecast that the number of cities presenting their candidature to the International Olympic Committee will diminish.

What measures may be taken in the face of this new crisis?

Rather than:

- reducing the programmes of the Summer and Winter Olympic Games
- reducing the number of individual sports
- cutting down the number of athletes according to sports event
- eliminating those which would qualify as "wealthy" sports

A reasonable solution

(through which one may aim at unanimous consent of all the International Sports Federations, including those which deal with certain extremely modern sports, which are not yet Olympic sports, such as skin-diving competitions, gliding, golf, etc...) would be one that would allow the smallest city of any country (having good sports

equipment and financial possibilities) to hold the Olympic Games.

For example, a nucleus of at least 5 cities could hold the Olympic Games and the Winter Games, each being in charge of several certain categories of competition. Thus, one could annul the need for gigantism and all discrimination, because one can, on each continent, organise, every 4 years, at the same time, a part of the great youth festival. After Montreal 1976, the Olympic Villages of double use may be a thing of the past.

It would be best to replace them with groups of modern and functional hotels (which would certainly be reserved exclusively for the athletic youth, national and international). They would also have the advantage of attracting tourists to these cities.

And thus, after the Games, the inevitable economic surprises concerning the always onerous conversion of the villages into dwellings will no longer be there.

To conclude, one must wish that before Montreal, the International Olympic Committee in close collaboration with all the international and national sports federations would draw up a final plan so that, beginning in 1980, the greatest worldwide manifestation of peace would be

celebrated at the same time on all continents, under the aegis of advanced and modern community principles.

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*Note from the editor: During its meeting with the I.O.C., the Montreal Organising Committee expressed the idea of building several Olympic Villages. The I.O.C. can not agree with their objectives. If it continues to follow the policies which may be traced to Pierre de COUBERTIN, the Olympic Villages must be assembling places of the youth of the entire world, a point of meeting and of privileged understanding.*