Design for the world’s stage

Finding meaning in international event venues.

Proposal

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BLINK, AND YOU’LL MISS IT.

BOBSLED TRACK
1984 OLYMPICS
SARAJEVO, YUGOSLAVIA
563,209,000 YUD ($387 MILLION USD)

PHOTOGRAPH BY DADO RUVIC
REUTERS
Sarajevo’s Olympic park is only a recent example of what has become an epidemic in the genre of event venue design. Global tradition continues to correlate short-term international spectacle with architectural monumentality, leaving in its wake an archive of tremendous material resources and embodied energy that fail to serve the lasting needs of the city. These event venues - glistening iconic landmarks celebrating singular moments in time and culture, rapidly lose meaning in the context of ever-transformative architectural and urban design. The curtain falls. The city matures. The “world’s stage” is quickly left behind.

Media attention and careful fiscal evaluation on these abandoned architectural graveyards has caused unprecedented international aversion towards hosting global events.

Where adaptive re-use has become the aspiration for most event venue design, London’s approach to 2012 Olympic campus changed the game with a media-lauded fleet of temporary architectural pavilions - addressing the white elephant of crumbling architectural ruins. Yet what are the limitations of these buildings on the spectator experience? How does such temporal architecture impact the lasting cultural iconicism that benefits urban identity and economy? And what of history’s events - including the 1889 Exposition Universelle (Paris) or the 1992 Summer Olympics (Barcelona) - which introduced permanent architectural and urban gestures that continue to revive the urban fabric and bolster the architectural experience?

The primary objective of this proposal is to examine these spaces firsthand and rigorously codify both successes and failures in order to craft a design guide that can better serve the longevity, meaning, and ecological responsibility of future built work in the genre. To accomplish this, I propose to take a front-row seat on the “world stage” - the theatrical corners of the world once at the center of the global attention, now largely at the edge of oblivion in the wake of irrelevance and programmatic rigidity.
Defining the World’s Stage
“World’s Stage” architecture caught the global eye with the rise of industrialism in the mid to late 1800s - evidenced by the a surge of nationally-sponsored exhibitions and international sporting events. A beacon of innovation and identity, the dramatic scale and cultural pride embedded in these buildings closely matched the spirit of the events themselves, welcomed healthy and lasting economic benefits, and set a gold standard for spectacle and landmark theatricality in hosted event venues across the globe. This genre of design currently faces a crossroads as global tradition pressures to expand the bounds of monumentality, and economic research struggles to fit the archaic model into a contemporary, shifting society. This struggle reveals a unique opportunity to reconcile the endangered architectural typology with the present and future needs of the city.

The struggles facing world’s stage architecture, for the purposes of this research proposal, can be primarily categorized by two critical and controversial components:

1) Program: World Stage venues are conceived to serve an event both short-term and non-repetitive. These architectural spaces are catered by necessity to exclusively iconise the objective program of the event, and are thus resistant to reuse and adaptation.

2) Scale: With the eyes of the globe on a single point in space, there exists a temporary but vital need to serve and infrastructure an unnaturally high surge in population. After the event, the vast embodied effort becomes an unnecessary excess in the urban fabric and challenges local economic sustainability.

Solution 1: Eliminate the World’s Stage Altogether.

Many are convinced that designer and political ego is the fuel exacerbating the white elephant of world’s stage architecture. This calls into question the importance of world’s stage events, and architecture’s present and future role in their definition. What values and meaning can the world’s stage bring to a burgeoning city? With the world becoming evermore interconnected via the web, are grand architectural venues necessary to identify and bolster the spirit of the event? Can future world stages adapt to more consistent needs in a city without losing what iconic value it offers? Is there a value in recycling the remnant stages of the past to service the needs of the future?

The London 2012 Olympic games introduced an alternative solution - capitalizing on existing urban infrastructure to absorb the needs of the event, and supplementing with visually-striking temporary pavilions.

Solution 2: Make the World’s Stage transformable.

Adaptive re-use is a natural fit for temporary architecture, but introduces questions regarding the temporal quality of space and contradicts the historically substantial phenomenological gravity of the world’s stage. How does alteration impact lasting iconography? To what extent can these enormous structures be salvaged or repurposed? Is the cannon of architectural design flattened by limiting the influence of world’s stage design to glorified, evanescent huts?

Solution 3: Centralize the World’s Stage.

Given the rapid rate of construction occurring in this building genre, the dwindling need for these buildings long-term, and a largely common set of unyielding design parameters, speculation has considered bringing the disparate stages of the world together literally under one roof to leverage shared resources and promote longevity. This does much to quell contemporary criticism, but eliminates the opportunity for transformation and architectural renaissance available to cities willing to endure and defray the shock of hosting major events. Does value persist in playing the part of Host City? Does ever-changing geographic location enhance the experience of the program? Alternatively, can a greater architectural schema be achieved with a centralized world’s stage?

Precedents offer the key to unlocking lasting meaning and future trajectory in this building typology. The ubiquitous program of the world’s stage sets a common factor by which to observe these signature venues across the globe. Physical remnants, by decree or by design, reveal the elements vital to cataloging the successes and failures of this architectural typology throughout history. Experiencing these ruins firsthand, my goal is to apply their lessons towards these three contemporary solutions, exploring, rethinking, and challenging each in potentially shaping the future of the World’s Stage.

1http://www.bloombergview.com/articles/2014-02-05/give-the-olympics-a-permanent-home
http://www.npr.org/2014/05/14/312142285/the-olympics-a-modern-day-worlds-fair-and-money-magnet
SEATTLE, US
- 1962 WORLD'S FAIR

VANCOUVER, CN
- EXPO 86

WASHINGTON DC, US
- PRESIDENTIAL INAUGURATIONS
- 1982 WORLD'S FAIR PROPOSAL

NEW YORK, NY
- 1939 AND 1964 WORLD'S FAIR

MONTREAL, CN
- EXPO 67

RIO DE JANEIRO, BR
- 2014 FIFA WORLD CUP
- 2016 OLYMPICS
- 2013 WORLD YOUTH DAY

MILAN, IT
- WORLD'S FAIR 2015

ROME, IT
- STADIO OLIMPICO
- COLISEUM
- ROMAN FORUM
- PIAZZA SAN PIETRO

VENICE, IT
- VENICE BIENNALE

ATHENS, GREECE
- OLYMPIC BIRTHPLACE
- 2004 OLYMPIC PARK

GENEVA, SW
- FUTURE HOME OF THE IOC

MUNICH, GE
- 1972 OLYMPICS

BERLIN, GE
- 1936 OLYMPICS

PARIS, FR
- EXPOSITION UNIVERSELLE
  1855, 1867, 1878, 1889, 1900, AND 1937

BARCELONA, SP
- 1929 EXPOSICION UNIVERSAL
- 1992 OLYMPIC PARK

LONDON, EN
- 1851 WORLD'S FAIR
- 2012 OLYMPIC PARK

BEIJING, PRC
- 2008 OLYMPIC PARK

SHANGHAI, PRC
- EXPO 2010

VANCOUVER, CN
- EXPO 1986

SEATTLE, US
- 1962 WORLD'S FAIR

SAN FRANCISCO, US
- 1915 PANAMA / PACIFIC EXHIBITION

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Borrowing from the Scientific Method, the project’s objectives can be mapped in a consistent, controlled, subdivided, and obsessively documented process to respond to the questions and hypotheses of the world’s stage.

**Understanding** - Preliminary research captures the promise, potential, and pitfalls of each site at multiple points in the design process.

**Conception:** *The Visionary Spark*
Discovering interest and opportunity in the unbuilt design.

**Birth:** *The Architectural Heyday*
Uncovering the struggles and unexpected delights in the architecture’s construction and first-use.

**Maturity:** *The Passing of Time*
Documenting the full (and often untold) story of these glistening icons after the event through media research, photography, and in-person interviews.

Documentation: Diagrams, narratives, sketches, photographs, GIS mapping, and cataloged news stories give a preliminary scrapbook of emotions and ideas to be manipulated, layered, and re-imagined during the project’s analysis.

**Experience** - Perhaps more than the architecture itself, these spaces create a unique atmosphere for interpersonal interaction. Adopting the role of spectator where possible, the second critical step in understanding the world’s stage is to take a front-row seat and witness the theatricality firsthand.

Documentation: In keeping with the visual spectacle of the events surrounding the world’s stage, documentation in this category seeks to capture through rigorous artistic, musical, technical, and mixed media the spirit and compelling branding that has come to define and iconicise the world’s stage.

**Analysis** - A meticulous culmination of data and documentation from *Understanding* and *Experience* provides the reference by which to challenge the three solutions offered for redesigning the world’s stage. In addition to identifying and classifying successful design strategies from global precedents, the analysis seeks to identity specific parameters by which to qualify and quantify success in the future.

Documentation: Graphic diagrams and notes begin to piece together the story woven between strands of collected evidence. As conclusions begin to form from observation and research, drawings and computational models test these iterations against the three purported hypotheses to uncover trends and parameter components.

**Summation** - The project states its conclusions in the form of a guidebook - designed to encourage best practices in designing and building the world’s stage. More than a checklist or recipe - both of which face the same obsolescence that challenges contemporary world’s stage design - the book distills trends, opportunities, and tests to the qualities worth remembering and the trajectories most appropriate for the future of the genre and expresses them in its final deliverable: A simple, compelling, and visually-rich reference for prospective cities around the world looking to be the next host of the world’s stage.
Not only is it vital to separate the criteria of “world’s stage” design from other similar architectural terms, but there exists an equal need to narrow the field even further – orchestrating a manageable, yet broad range of sites to study and experience in the course of a year’s travel abroad.

For the purposes of this project, criteria on the “world’s stage” focuses heavily on its biggest strains: program and scale. To illustrate, understand, and manipulate these constraints most fully, this project turns to the world’s three largest contemporary gatherings: the Olympics, the World’s Fair, and the World Cup to answer the challenges facing world stage design. These sites, peppered across the globe, represent a wide variety of approaches and outcomes despite very similar initial objectives, and are thus an optimal subject for this intense investigation.

Site Selection

Originals
These spaces share the birthplace of “world’s stage” design, and each contribute a chapter to its meaning and significance. The commonalities of these original spaces reveal a thread of vital continuity. However, discrepancies call into consideration the prevalence of deviance over the course of time.

Optimist
While not supporting its original intent and program, these spaces left behind a usable, dynamic, spatial footprint which continues to inspire and attract public access.

Icon
These memorable spaces are the product of singular vision and design intent. Their powerful form and memorability maintain a substantial value and lasting economy to the site.

Graveyard
Perhaps the most controversial category of world stage design, these representative buildings and campuses failed to sustain necessity after the initial event; prompting questions of relevancy and responsibility.

Other
While not an active participator in the chosen events (Olympics, World’s Fair, and World Cup), these spaces address many of the same challenges of uneven fluctuation, iconicism, and grand architectural form making.

In Progress
It is a rare and precious moment to be able to witness the construction and showcase of new and innovative world stage sites. Two spaces in the coming year show the most active participation in developing and spreading the world’s stage.
Athens, GR

OLYMPIC BIRTHPLACE

Athens set the stage for large-scale international sporting events. Incorporation of entertainment and religious practices maintained a steady consistency of program.

SOURCE: REUTERS

Paris, FR

WORLD EXPOSITION BIRTHPLACE
EXPOSITION UNIVERSELLE 1855, 1867, 1878, 1889, 1900, AND 1937

The city began the exhibitionist movement with a series of events along the existing Champs-Élysées. In time the event grew larger, more centralized, and more impacting on the urban landscape.

SOURCE: BEHN SUNG

Rome, IT

HISTORIC SPORTING SPECTACLE
STADIO OLIMPICO
COLISEUM
ROMAN FORUM
PIAZZA SAN PIETRO

Rome introduced an alternate sporting architecture. The course of history saw multiple uses for the building, including at one time a renovated hotel and church space.

SOURCE: JERZY STRZELECKI
This architectural event is marked by constantly changing smaller exhibitions in architecture and design. The model suggests that such gatherings can occur with significance in more traditional settings.

A major portion of Chicago’s urban parkscape can be attributed to a grand design gesture for the World’s Fair of 1893 and the renovation to the site for the World’s Fair 1993.

Little public or private space remains of the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis, despite having a nearly identical urban and architectural design model as a successful and lasting reference.
All that remains of Nashville’s World’s Fair site is rolling grasses and a 1:1 scale of the Parthenon in concrete aggregate. The bizarre image clashes with the town’s cultural brand, yet remains a wayfinding figure within the city.


Remnants of the 1986 World Expo continue to inform and enliven the city’s connection with water. This introduces a study into environmentalism in global events, and the power of design to leverage sustainable and iconic objectives.
Optimist (cont.)

Berlin, GE
1936 OLYMPICS

The 1936 Olympic Stadium, still in operation, continues to be a symbolic landmark in the heart of Germany. It’s political back story illuminates a strand of intrigue related to the politics of World Stage design and international pride and identity.

Shanghai, PRC
EXPO 2010

Shanghai recently hosted the World Expo, featuring a striking entrance pavilion. Little documentation exists for the present state of the campus - creating cause for interest in the present state, upkeep, and public interest of the facility.

Munich, GE
1972 OLYMPICS

Munich introduced an innovative concept in its fluid and quasi-temporary architectural form. This serves as a prime example of a temporary structure which, though the value of iconicism, continues to serve a permanent role.
Barcelona, SP
1929 EXPOSICION UNIVERSAL
1992 OLYMPIC PARK

Barcelona’s Olympic and Exposition spaces are unique for capitalizing extensively on the building’s existing landmarks and urban fabric - allowing its new infrastructure to integrate seamlessly with neighboring spaces.

New York, US
WORLD’S FAIR 1939
WORLD’S FAIR 1964

The signature architecture of New York’s world fairs has become a trademark of the area, and creates a valuable and memorable identity for neighboring communities.

Seattle, US
WORLD’S FAIR 1962

The Seattle Space Needle introduced new heights to the World’s Stage. The building’s original urban plan is largely altered, but the architectural icon has spurred inspiration for nearby iconic venues including Frank Gehry’s Experience Music Project.
San Francisco, US
1915 PANAMA / PACIFIC EXHIBITION
San Francisco’s Presidio park has become a signature landmark for the city, and a defining feature in determining real estate value - critical in the contemporary story of the Bay Area.

Montreal, CN
EXPO 67
Expo 67, originally an architectural thesis project, quickly rose to landmark status as an innovative and engaging World Stage venue.

Beijing, PRC
2008 OLYMPIC PARK
Beijing set a new bar for architectural design with its striking forms - crowned by one of the most iconic stadiums of post-WWII Olympic games. Today, most of the exhibition spaces, including the kayaking arena shown at left, are entirely abandoned.
Athens, GR

2004 OLYMPIC PARK

Athens entered the Olympics with a dwindling economy, making future maintenance of Olympic facilities near impossible. The city strikes an uncomfortable chord being both the birthplace of the Olympic games and an example of its folly.

Montreal, CN

1976 OLYMPIC PARK

Less than a decade following a successful World Expo, Montreal’s Olympic complex includes many of the features of a promising design. Lack of necessity, however, leaves this iconic landmark largely abandoned.

Washington DC, US

PRESIDENTIAL INAUGURATIONS
1892 WORLD’S FAIR PROPOSAL

Washington DC’s urban infrastructure was never planned for an Olympic event or World Fair, but plenty of events happen in the area to merit a study in infrastructure and planning.
Geneva, SW

The first question to consider when proposing a centralized World Stage is its location. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) is currently based in Geneva, which serves as a common ground for international confrontation. This site presents a strong opportunity for development consideration.

SOURCE: ARCH DAILY

In Progress

Milan, IT

The most significant “World Stage” event to occur in the coming calendar year is the World Expo 2015 in Milan, Italy. The proposed schedule is specifically centered on this event, allowing for an up-close and personal encounter with World Stage design and experience.

SOURCE: INHABITAT

Rio De Janeiro, BR

While not a permanent solution, Rio answered the challenges of World Stage design by stacking multiple events together and leveraging shared resources for each endeavor. The innovative model suggests further investigation as the city recuperates from the 2014 World Cup and prepares for the 2016 Summer Olympics.

SOURCE: FOX NEWS