From Chamonix to Salt Lake City: Evolution of the Olympic Village Concept at the Winter Games

Jean-Loup Chappelet[1]

Nowadays the concept of the Olympic Village as a special "resort" which brings together athletes and their companions is a standard feature of the schedule upon which the organisation of the Olympic Games is based. It is featured in rule 42 of the *Olympic Charter* (IOC, 1995:66). It is even true to say that from now on it is a concept which is central to the Olympic idea, given that the Village, in principle, assembles all the participants of the Games under the same roof, where they can exchange ideas and form friendships, or simply share a meal and watch their fellow athletes' exploits on television together. This gives them an opportunity to get to know each other better, making people seem less "foreign": "a friend for life" as the song at the Barcelona Games goes.

However, as you know, this has not always been the case. There was no Olympic Village at the first Summer Games, nor indeed until after the Antwerp Games in 1920. The first time that the idea of housing all the athletes in the same place was put into practice was at the Paris Games in 1924, and not at the Los Angeles Games, eight years later, as is often stated. This was primarily for financial rather than philosophical reasons. It was not until the Winter Olympic Games in Squaw Valley in 1960 that the organisers provided the participants with a real Olympic Village, as we would come to see it. In this case, it was also for very pragmatic reasons.

Since then Summer Games Villages have had to provide accommodation for over fifteen thousand people. It is a Village where contacts are not necessarily easier than in any normal urban areas. Winter Olympic Villages, with just 3,500 beds, are much smaller and thus better inclined to fulfil their function as places of intercultural communication.

The aim of this article is to trace the historical evolution of the concept of the Olympic Village at the Winter Games and to reflect on its possibilities for the future. In so doing, we can lay down some tracks for the future, as, in the words of Pierre de Coubertin, "All past events influence the future, and no future can be built without taking the past into account" (Pierre de Coubertin, 1923). This historical evolution of the Winter Villages can be divided into three main periods: pre-1960, 1964-1984 and 1988 onwards. Our plan will be based on these three periods.

1924-1956: Prior to the existence of Winter Olympic Villages

The Winter Games were created in 1924. They were titled "The Winter Sports Week of the VIII Olympiad" and took place six months before the Paris Games. Although the first Olympic Village was set up on this occasion near to the Colombes Olympic stadium, nothing like this was set up in Chamonix.

Due to the low number of participants, the hotels at the organising resort were able to provide sufficient accommodation. This was organised by countries, and certain teams rented entire hotels. This system was used until 1956.

---

[1] *Full University Professor of Management, Swiss Graduate School of Public Administration, Lausanne*

Game/Year	Countries/ Athletes	Type of Village	Number of beds	Location
Chamonix'24	16/290	Hotels	-	Majestic & Palace
St. Moritz'28	25/360	Hotels	-	
Lake Placid'32	17/280	Hotels	-	Lake Placid & others
Garmisch'36	8/760	Hotels	-	
St. Moritz'48	28/810	Hotels	-	
Oslo'52	30/730	Residences accommod.*	1,200	Sogn, Ullevl & Ila (centre)
Cortina'56	32/920	Hotels (28)	1,415	Cortina & Misurina

* for students, hospital employees and senior citizens

In Chamonix, in an era when winter sports were practised by an elite, the two best hotels in the resort (the Majestic and the Chamonix Palace) provided accommodation for the majority of the participants. The members and officials of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) also stayed there, as well as some of the organising bodies, notably the "Publicity and Arts Commission" and the "Press Bureau" (Comité National Olympique et Sportif Français, 1924:833). At that time, contact between managers, athletes and journalists represented no problem.

In St. Moritz, at the second Olympic Winter Games, the delicate matter of hotel allocation was dealt with by the mayor himself and by the director of his Tourist Office. The community undertook to provide accommodation for officials and athletes at prices ranging between 10 and 18 Swiss francs, according to the chosen category (*Rapport officiel des IIe Jeux Olympiques d'hiver St. Moritz 1928*, 1928:9).

At Lake Placid, in 1932, several delegations stayed at the Lake Placid Club, a huge collection of lakeside wooden cottages, which would be used again for officials in the 1980 Games. Contracts were signed with hotel and house owners to guarantee a maximum price of between 2 and 4 US$. This price was partially subsidised by the Organising Committee in order to attract the maximum possible number of participants, despite the world-wide economic crisis (III Olympic Winter Games Committee, 1932:109-115). A similar approach led to the creation of the large Los Angeles Village in the same year. The Pennsylvania Hotel on the 7th Avenue in New York served as a temporary base for all teams travelling by boat.

At Garmisch-Partenkirchen, the entire region was asked to provide accommodation as there were almost three times as many participants as there had been at Lake Placid. At Cortina, in 1956, in the light of the predicted number of participants - already over 1,500 (amongst whom was the later-to-be President of the IOC, Juan Antonio Samaranch, Captain of the Spanish team) - the organisers planned to build a Village near Cignes, on the right bank of the River Boite. However, the local hotel-keepers did not view this project favourably and the provisional construction techniques were not then what they are now. In the end, they reached an agreement with the hotel-keepers' association to book 80% of their rooms for the participants, leaving them 20% for their normal clients. Tourist tax was temporarily abolished. Certain hotels received subsidies from the Organisation Committee to improve their accommodation standards. The 32 teams were

allocated accommodation in the 28 hotels in the area (Organising Committee of the VIII Olympic Winter Games Cortina d'Ampezzo, 1956:267-276). There was only one problem worth mentioning: the Hungarian team booked the entire Ancora Hotel for 100 people and only three came! The owner of the hotel was the president of the hotel-keepers' association and he had not asked them for a deposit. He obviously did not bear any grudges against the Olympic idea as he was later "superintendant" of the Village at Lake Placid.

From Chamonix in 1924 until Cortina d'Ampezzo in 1956, accommodation was habitually provided by hotels in the Olympic resort. The only exception was the Oslo Games in 1952. In the Norwegian capital, three separate purpose-built residences were provided for the participants, with 740 rooms: a 600-bed residence in Sogn (destined to become student accommodation), a second 400-bed residence in Ulleval (destined to become halls of residence for the personnel at the hospital of the same name), and a third one with 200 at Ila (destined to become a home for senior citizens) (Organising Committee of the Games of the VI Olympiad Oslo 1952, 1952:80-89). This was a precursor of the Winter Village concept, even though these residences were spread out all over Oslo.

1960: the first Winter Olympic Village

From the Squaw Valley Games in 1960 onwards, the organisers realised that it was no longer possible to furnish participants with hotel accommodation, firstly because the numbers were getting too large and, secondly, because the hotels had to accommodate the officials and the increasingly prolific number of journalists.

The organisers of the Squaw Valley Games built a residence comprising 4 small 3-storey buildings connected by covered walkways, five minutes' walk from most of the competition sites. This was the first real Winter Games Village as both athletes and their companions were staying under the same roof. One of the residences was for women only. The showers and toilets were communal (one bathroom for 25 double rooms per floor!). Saunas, requested by the Scandinavians, were also installed (Organising Committee of the VIII Olympic Winter Games Squaw Valley 1960, 1960:33-39).

A central wooden building was set up for catering and recreational purposes. It was built like an enormous chalet with the roof reaching down to the ground. The café seated 900 people at any one time, in a large room decorated with the flags of the 30 participating nations. The guests would meet at lunchtime on the sunny terrace in front of the building and around the stone fireplace at night, next to which there was a stage. Theme evenings were organised, one of which was a Western night. The Hollywood artists entertained them for free. There was a cinema showing films every afternoon and evening. There was a games room, complete with a bar serving free ice-creams and the Village was decorated with large plaster statues made by Walt Disney teams (who were also in charge of the ceremony).

This was the prototype of what would later become the Winter Games: although they were to become larger, more comfortable and more sophisticated with each successive Games, in accordance with the Olympic motto: "*citius, altius, fortius*".

1964 - 1984: Winter Villages as new residential neighbourhoods

From the 1964 Innsbruck Games onwards, and during the next 20 years, the Winter Villages were set up in new purpose-built buildings in the new Olympic Village neighbourhoods: Neu-Arzl in Innsbruck, Echirolles in Grenoble, Makomanai in Sapporo, Mojmilo in Sarajevo. These cities, of

over 100,000 inhabitants, do indeed have ever-increasing populations which can easily absorb the hundreds of apartments put on the market following the Games.

Games/Year	Countries/ Athletes	Type of Village	Number of beds	Location
Squaw Valley'60	30/650	Residence*	1,200	N.West Squaw Valley
Innsbruck'64	36/930	Apart. building	1,400	Neu-Arzl (East Innsbruck)
Grenoble'68	37/1290	Apart. building	1,400	ZUP Sud Eybens-Echirolles
Sapporo'72	35/1130	Apart. building	2,300	Suburb of Makomanai
Innsbruck'76	37/1260	Apart. building	1,970	Neu-Arzl (East Innsbruck)
Lake Placid'80	37/1280	Residence**	2,010	Ray Brook (W. Lake Placid)
Sarajevo'84	49/1490	Apart. building	1,950	Mojmilo (South Sarajevo)

* hotel / ** borstal

In Innsbruck, for example, it was the neighbourhoods in the East of the city which were developed for both the 1964 and 1976 Games. Numerous 10-storey high apartment blocks were built on the banks of the Erin, some of which form the Village itself. These were surrounded by a security perimeter fence and the others were used to house the personnel needed for the Games and the people accompanying the teams over and above the authorised quota. These apartments were provisionally furnished by the Austrian Army. A private company set up for the event subcontracted the restoration work. A daily paper for the residents was published for the first time (Organising Committee of the IX Olympic Winter Games Innsbruck 1964, 1967:50-59).

The 1976 Village consisted of 19 apartment blocks (compared to just 4 in 1964). It also had a covered swimming pool (a unique feature at that time) and a polyclinic (*Innsbruck'76 Bulletin*, 1976:191-194). It was also provided with an exceptional security system: a double fence with electronic detectors patrolled by guards with dogs and lit up at night. These were the first Games held after the ones in Munich and this security system then became standard at all following Games.

In Grenoble, the athletes' Village was built in a PUZ (Priority Urbanisation Zone) in the South, 3 km from the city. It had: a) a university residence made up of eleven four and five-storey apartment blocks with 800 single rooms; b) a 300-room hostel for young workers reserved for women only, complete with bathroom facilities; c) a fifteen-floor tower block with 52 apartments; d) a nursery school which was used as the reception area. The whole area was surrounded by a fence (Organising Committee of the X Olympic Winter Games Grenoble 1968, 1968:64-72).

In Sapporo, in 1972, the Olympic Village was built on the site of the Hokkaido Province Police Training School in the suburb of Makomanai, following the decision to transfer the School elsewhere. It comprised eleven apartment blocks in a 15-hectare area near to a public park and an

underground station. The speed-skating stadium where the opening ceremony was held and the large skating rink were nearby. The perimeter of the Village had no less than 7 entrances. The daily charge for a room was set at 2,500 Yen and included the possibility of taking baths in warm sand or ions (Organising Committee of the XI Olympic Winter Games Sapporo 1972, 1972:349-361).

Two years before the Sarajevo Games, the organisers, having originally envisaged a solution along the lines of a university campus (at Nedzarici), decided to build a 639 apartment Village at Mojmilo, complete with all the communal buildings which would be needed for the future neighbourhood.

Nowadays, these Villages, like those of many of the Summer Games, have become rather banal residential areas, rather like council estates, where a solitary commemorative plaque reminds passers-by of its origins. The Sarajevo Village, located between the town and the airport, was one of the areas most affected by the civil war at the beginning of the 1990s.

The only Olympic Village which was not planned as a future residential area was the Village at Lake Placid. In fact, in the out of season period, the Lake Placid Village has around 2,000 permanent inhabitants, which is less than the number of participants who lived there during the Games. The town had no use for so much post-Olympic accommodation.

The opportunity arose for the Federal Government to build a reformatory at a cost of 22 million US$, and the organisers decided to convert it into the Olympic Village. This "prison" label gave it bad publicity as, given its future function, the Village had maximum security installations, in particular a double wire fence equipped with close circuit surveillance cameras. What is more, it was located right next door to the headquarters of the State Police. In the States, a large campaign was organised by various churches and organisations representing the black population to protest about the construction of this detention centre so far from the nearest large towns, thus making prison visits difficult.

The five, 2-storey brick buildings housing the cells were spread out over a 16 hectare area and did not have the air of a prison. Their architecture was even quite meticulous. They were complete with vast communal areas which were used for the offices, the polyclinic, the café, a theatre/cinema, a library and a discotheque, etc. The organisers had thought of accommodating four athletes to a "cell" but they soon realised that they could only put a maximum of two people in each. They had to complement the residential buildings with an impressive caravan park for around 80 mobile homes, each with a sitting room, 4 bedrooms and 2 bathrooms. Luckily they were all covered with a blanket of snow. For the first time male and female athletes were no longer accommodated in separate areas, instead they were grouped by sports teams and nationalities (Organizing Committee of the XIII Olympic Winter Games Lake Placid 1980, 1981:155-163).

Workshops were also set up for the teams in some mobile homes just outside the Village and, 7 km away, there was a gym with a swimming pool for the exclusive use of the residents. This included an exercise room inside the Village. Having worked as a voluntary interpreter in this Village, I have very good memories of the atmosphere there, particularly in the discotheque and in the electronic games room.

Due to the fact that they were conceived of as new neighbourhoods in large towns, Olympic Villages between 1964 and 1984 were located relatively far away from the centre of town. This was also the case in the Village of Ray Brook, 13 km west of Lake Placid. They could thus be criticised for lacking symbiosis with the rest of the Games. They turned into mini towns where the atmosphere was generally very good thanks to the varied entertainment programmes, but this

meant that suddenly the spectators no longer got to see the competitors in the hosting Olympic town. The winners came and received their medals and returned to their haven of security.

The period between 1964 and 1984 also saw the birth of the satellite Village phenomenon - residential areas next to competition sites located further afield. All Winter Games during this period, except Sapporo and Lake Placid, had them, particularly the Nordic disciplines in Seefeld (Innsbruck 1964 and 1976), Autran (Grenoble) and Igman (Sarajevo). Added to the convenience of living close by, the athletes of these disciplines also need to live more or less at the same altitude as the competition site. In Albertville, this tendency reached an extreme and even threatened the idea of the Village as a central meeting place.

1988-2002: towards new alternatives

The Calgary Games of 1988 saw the beginning of a new period which marked the evolution of new solutions for the concept of Winter Villages. Smaller, more attractive residential estates were given preference over large council-like apartment blocks. The Olympic Village was located closer to the centre of the Olympics or the competition sites.

Games/Year	Countries/ Athletes	Type of Village	Beds	Location
Calgary'88	57/1,550	Residences*	2,150	University of Calgary Campus
Albertville'92	64/1,800	Hotels	1,800	Brides les Bains
Lillehammer'94	67/1,740	Wooden houses	2,300	Skarsetlia (N.E. Lille.)
Nagano'98	?	Apartment blocks	3,000	Imai New Town
Salt Lake 2002	?	Residences*	4,000	University of Utah Campus

* for students

Admittedly, the Village for the Nagano Games in 1998 will be made up of 1,000 apartments in blocks spread over 19 hectares in Imai New Town, but this meets the housing needs of this fast-developing region. A hotel in Karuizawa will be used as a special Village for the curling teams (Organising Committee for the XVIII Olympic Winter Games, Nagano 1998, 1996:68-69).

In Calgary in 1988, as will be the case in Salt Lake City in the year 2002, the main Olympic Village will be set up on a university campus. The residences they build will be reused as student accommodation and will supplement the existing halls of residence which will be renovated for the event. This post-Olympic use guarantees the maximum number of single rooms or rooms for two people which the athletes prefer. The other normal campus facilities such as a café, gym, sports grounds and swimming pool will also be available. The only inconvenience is that the students will have to be temporarily rehoused (Comité d'Organisation des XVes. Jeux Olympiques d'Hiver, 1988:175-179 and 387-397).

However, not all Olympic Winter host towns are large enough to have a university with expanding needs. This was the case in Albertville and Lillehammer, two small towns with around 25,000 inhabitants. However, they both adopted radically different solutions.

The OCOG in Albertville proposed using the accommodation capacity of the small spa at Brides-les-Bains, located at the heart of the Tarentaise region and linked to sports sites by a cable car. The OCOG thus promoted the complete renovation of all their hotels from the "années folles" and other hotel accommodation from the '50s, as well as the entire infrastructure of the resort which got heavily into debt in the process.

The Village/ski-resort was located 35 km from the Olympic Village itself and even further away from numerous other sites. This distance, coupled with the risk of bad weather which made transporting the athletes from one place to another dangerous, and the orders of the International Federations and National Olympic Committees led to the creation of five other Villages using existing local hotel accommodation: in Saisies (for cross-country skiing and biathlon), in Val d'Isère (for men's downhill skiing), in La Plagne (for bobsleigh and luge races), in La Tania (for ice-hockey), in Tignes (for freestyle skiing), as well as two other sites for demonstration sports (speed-skiing and curling). Thus the main Village only provided accommodation for the athletes in the figure-skating, ski-jumping, Nordic combined and women's downhill skiing competitions (Comité d'Organisation des XVIes. Jeux Olympiques d'Hiver d'Albertville et de la Savoie, 1992:406-417).

Following this unexpected experience, although it had been pointed out by the Inspection Committee of the NOCs during the candidature, the IOC decided to insist on a single Olympic Village. It had also drafted, in collaboration with the ANOC (Association of National Olympic Committees) some directives concerning the Village which lay down the minimum conditions required.

Also, since 1992, the OCOGs have been obliged to offer accommodation to all athletes and their companions in Villages. This put an end to the long discussions between organisers and the IOC about Village accommodation prices which had been the fly in the ointment of the preparatory discussions regarding all previous Games.

In Lillehammer, in the near total absence of available accommodation, the organisers decided to construct an almost completely temporary Olympic Village on a 23 hectare site 3 km from the town centre. They built just under 200 wooden Norwegian-style chalets, grouped into rows of varying lengths to form small neighbourhoods. These houses were then immediately sold to Norwegian families, most of them being permanently installed elsewhere. A small part of the estate constitutes a new quarter of Lillehammer. Only 7,000 square metres, out of the total 55,000 square metres available, were left in place after the Olympics and are now used as an old people's home, a kindergarten and church. These service buildings are also made of wood.

The construction of the Village cost a total of 250 million Norwegian Krona (i.e. around 50 million Swiss Francs). It was built over a two-year period, at a rate of 250 square metres per day, particularly with the help of prefabrication techniques (Lillehammer Olympic Organising Committee, 1994:v.2, 90-95). A similar option, although less landscaped, was used for the media Village.

Such a solution, almost entirely provisional, seems to have been imposed on all candidates who wish to host the Winter Games, or at least on all those who do not have a university or an enormous population capable of absorbing around a thousand apartments. This is what Sion has proposed in its candidature for the year 2006. The Evaluation Commission of the IOC had in fact criticised the proposal of using two existing hotels for the Games in the year 2002: a spa in Saillon in the Bas-Valais region, otherwise deemed excellent, and a holiday village in Fiesch in the Haut-Valais region. Moreover, six out of the nine candidates for the Winter Games in 2002 proposed more than one Olympic Village, some of which have recourse to remote hotels

(Tarvisio, Italy) or apartment blocks (Poprad, Slovakia). Only Oestersund, Quebec and Salt Lake City have proposed single Villages.

The IOC now favours the use of a single Olympic Village in order to promote contact between athletes from different countries, even though, as we have seen, that has not been the rule at all since 1964, notably for the Nordic disciplines, and despite the fact that several stars choose not to stay in the Village. This important requirement will inevitably lead us to imagine innovative solutions which will take environmental, energetic and financial constraints, as well as the issues of comfort and post-use, equally into account. Sion - Valais for example, has proposed using the concept of a modular and transportable hotel for the Games in the year 2006 which the Swiss National Exhibition wants to perfect, and which has already been installed as a prototype at Lax in the Grison region.

The Olympic Winter Village should become, like its counterpart in the summer, a model for the long-lasting development of a whole region - a development which meets the needs of current generations, whilst preserving that of future generations.