



# Strengthening the image of Marseille through nautical architectural infrastructure: Analysis of the modernisation of the Roucas Blanc Marina for the 2024 Summer Olympics

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## Abstract

Architectural investments in sports infrastructure serve marketing purposes, particularly place branding and city image creation. The article examines the modernisation of the Roucas Blanc facilities, Marseille, for 2024 Summer Olympics nautical events. It discusses tourism and image-related benefits. The study used a mixed method. Firstly, secondary materials, including Marseille's official project documents and development strategies were collected and analysed. Secondly, field studies with photographic documentation of the modernised Roucas Blanc Marina focused on functionality and architectural solutions. Thirdly, a survey among coaches of the Polish sailing team preparing for the Olympics was conducted. Despite the shortage of respondents ( $n = 6$ ), the survey provided expert opinions on the port facilities. The documents confirmed that nautical infrastructure is a cornerstone of Marseille's promotional strategy. The photographs revealed architecturally and functionally coherent development and facilities well integrated into the surroundings. The coaches appreciated the facility's modernity and indicated their intention for future training camps there. The study confirmed that the Roucas Blanc Marina modernisation strengthens Marseille's image and can promote the long-term sports tourism development. The limited survey scope and the scarcity of data following the Games indicates the need for further long-term analyses of the impact these investments have exerted on the city.

## Keywords

- sailing infrastructure
- nautical architectural infrastructure
- 2024 Summer Olympics
- Roucas Blanc Marina

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## Introduction

Cities all over the world are increasingly searching for ways to strengthen their image and attract new target groups, including both athletes and tourists. Investments in sports infrastructure are one of the tools used for this purpose, as they can thoughtfully contribute to the development and promotion of a city (Berg et al., 2002). The development and modernisation of sports facilities allow not only to improve the quality of residents' lives and advance tourism, but also to create a recognisable image, which is in line with the ever more popular strategies of the city as a "megaproduct" (Kaźmierczak, 2007). In coastal areas, nautical infrastructure, especially marinas and yacht harbours, becomes particularly significant. When properly integrated into the coastline, such infrastructure can contribute to enhancing the landscape and stimulating recreation (Martín & Yepes, 2019).

In a broader context, it is worth referring to contemporary trends in place marketing (Kotler et al., p. 142) and urban planning strategies in cities where tourism and sports are becoming increasingly relevant (Stockholms stad, 2018). Such initiatives draw on the principles of the theory of needs (Maslow & Frager, 1987), attempting to satisfy both the basic expectations of visitors (attractiveness of space, easy access to services) and the more complex desires related to contact with culture or nature. Barcelona is one example of a city that has used sport to enhance its image. The modernisation of the waterfront and the Olympic Port for the 1992 Olympic Games became a turning point in the international perception of the city (Berg et al., 2002). Although studies have discussed the impact of major sporting events on urban development (Chalkley & Essex, 1999), relatively little attention has so far been paid to the analysis of marinas and their potential to enhance a destination's image (Raviv et al., 2009). This indicates a research gap in terms of a thorough understanding of how sporting nautical infrastructure can support city marketing and fit into the overall urban strategy (Mason, 2012). France, which secured the right to host the 2024 Summer Olympics after three consecutive attempts (Jastrzābek, 2023), has proposed ambitious revitalisation measures in Marseille. The Roucas Blanc Marina, which was modernised with sailing events in mind, became part of this strategy. The example of Marseille perfectly illustrates the range of opportunities and challenges facing port cities that want to take advantage of sport for promotion and development.

Studies to date suggest that sporting events act as a catalyst for infrastructure improvements (Chalkley & Essex, 1999), but success in creating a new image of a place depends on various factors. A coherent urban vision and a long-term promotional strategy are crucial (Collins et al., 2019). In the context of Marseille, the modernisation of Roucas Blanc Marina may constitute a lasting Olympic leg-

acy, provided that it serves residents, tourists and athletes for years to come, as intended in the project (SAFESE SAS, 2021; Société de Livraison des Ouvrages Olympiques, n.d.).

Thus, the question remains: to what extent does modern, sustainable nautical infrastructure have the potential to generate long-term promotional benefits for port cities? Can investments in ports – as was the case in Barcelona – contribute to comprehensive revitalisation and a lasting change of image, or are such initiatives at risk of being a mere one-off spectacle associated with a major sporting event (Collins et al., 2019)? In the case of Marseille, despite numerous promises and ambitious development plans (Établissement Public d'Aménagement Euroméditerranée, 2019; Métropole Aix-Marseille-Provence, 2022), it remains to be seen whether and how the modernisation of Roucas Blanc Marina will translate into the long-term promotion of the city.

To answer these questions, in this paper, the following thesis is put forward: the architectural infrastructure of the marina influences the creation of the city's image and can act as a marketing tool to attract contestants and tourists.

The subsequent sections of the study discuss the field and survey research conducted, the aim of which was to empirically verify the importance of the architectural facilities of the marina in shaping the brand of Marseille. Such an analysis helps not only to fill a research gap in the existing scientific literature, but also contributes to a better understanding of place marketing strategies in the context of seaside sports destinations.

## 1. Literature review

The scientific literature on the architectural infrastructure of a marina demonstrates how it influences the image of a city; it also shows how such architecture can be used as a marketing tool to attract competitors and tourists. Sporting events (e.g. international competitions) offer a great opportunity to promote a city. Individual events such as the Olympic Games can attract the attention and resources required for large infrastructure and social projects. A classic example is Barcelona, which used the 1992 Olympic Games to comprehensively revitalise and promote itself as an internationally attractive city. As a key revitalisation activity, the city's waterfront was significantly redeveloped, bringing the city closer to the sea (Berg et al., 2002).

The Olympic Port in Barcelona was built from scratch before the 1992 Olympic Games, transforming the former industrial port area into a modern public space which has become a significant element of the city's infrastructure and a tourist

attraction (Port Olímpic de Barcelona, n.d.). As Ikiz (2016) points out, the growing interest in marinas and yacht tourism contributes to strengthening the image of the city of Muğla as an international destination. He suggests that investments in marina infrastructure and effective promotion can support the city in competing with other European tourist destinations. Key actions involve hosting international sailing events, developing environmentally friendly marinas and improving service quality.

Attempting to change a city's image through hosting a sporting event may not always be successful. A single event may not be enough to successfully rebrand a city; consistent, long-term measures and infrastructural solutions are needed. One example is the 2012 Volvo Ocean Race (VOR) final in Galway, Ireland. The event failed to provide the impetus for the revitalisation and redevelopment of the seaport and did not result in the creation of Galway's image as a city associated with the sea (Collins et al., 2019).

Research on the factors influencing the attractiveness of marinas for competitive sailors and tourists was conducted in Denmark and the UK using the Kano model (Shen et al., 2021). The results of the study provide guidance for future strategic decisions in marina destination management.

In conclusion, the examples of Barcelona and Muğla show that investments in marinas and the organisation of prestigious sailing events contribute both to socio-economic revitalisation and prompt the creation of a new brand for the place. On the other hand, cases such as that of Galway prove that a single event cannot guarantee a lasting change in the image if it is not accompanied by comprehensive and long-term promotional activities and coherent development strategies. Furthermore, a multifaceted approach (territorial, local, internal) is needed to better understand the relationship between marinas and their surroundings and to fully capitalise on their tourism and sports potential. However, there are still relatively few publications that focus on the architectural dimension of marinas in the context of city promotion, which indicates an existing research gap and the need for further, multifaceted analyses.

## **2. Materials and methodology**

In order to verify the thesis that the architectural infrastructure of the marina influences the creation of the city's image and can serve as a marketing tool to attract competitors and tourists, a mixed method was used; it comprised document analysis, field research and surveys. The research was conducted in Roucas Blanc Marina, which had been selected for the 2024 Summer Olympics in Marseille.

Based on the analysis of data contained in the strategy literature and published documents as well as the official website, information on Marseille's aspirations to promote the city and create its image through sailing infrastructure was obtained. The assumptions resulting from the above analysis were subjected to a dual-stage verification using the following methods:

- field research (Akšamija, 2021) of the modernised architectural infrastructure of the Roucas Blanc Marina,
- questionnaire surveys (Akšamija, 2021) conducted among coaches.

The photographs taken during the field research following the modernisation of Roucas Blanc Marina formed the basis for the assessment of elements relevant to athletes, residents and tourists, as well as the urban aspect affecting the aesthetics of the investment and its coherence with the surroundings. The questionnaire surveys were used to gather coaches' opinions on the architecture of Roucas Blanc Marina and its potential as a model training centre worth returning to. The information regarding the port's special features and values, contained in the documents, was also verified based on their opinions. A representative group of sailing coaches from the Polish national team took part in the survey. This group is by nature a small, highly specialised community. This specific nature of the group implies that even with a relatively modest number of respondents, it is possible to obtain significant information on professional opinions. Coaches, being the people who train athletes at the highest level, use flexible training methods, but also adapt to local conditions and jointly oversee training with the athletes, drawing on their experience and tacit knowledge developed over years of practice (Saury & Durand, 1998). They are, therefore, excellent respondents and a source of knowledge in the assessment of the Marina and its functionality.

The chosen mixed research method was applied deliberately to verify the thesis on multiple levels. This approach made it possible to examine the issue from different perspectives and increase the reliability of the results. The literature analysis was verified through expert opinions and empirical research conducted on-site. This approach ensured not only theoretical but also practical confirmation of the research assumptions.

### 3. Results

In 2021, the following documents in which the strengthening of the image of Marseille through nautical infrastructure was emphasised were made publicly available:

- Project Declaration entitled Modernisation of the Roucas Blanc nautical stadium and implementation of seaside investments in view of the organisation of the 2024 Olympic Games in Marseille (SAFEGE SAS., 2021),
- Public Tender documentation, concerning the presentation summary of the Roucas Blanc Water Sports Stadium Modernisation project (Ville de Marseille, 2021).

The Roucas Blanc Marina was established in the 1970s as part of the extension of Prado Park, which is located to the north. The location of the marina offers many advantages. The city of Marseille is defined as a “port city”, highly appealing to tourists. The local waters enjoy an international reputation. Marseille has hosted prestigious regattas such as the ISAF World Sailing Days in 2002, the Student Yachting World Cup in 2009 and 2017, and the annual SNIM Regatta as part of the Mediterranean International Maritime Week. Before it was decided to organise the Olympic Games in Roucas Blanc Marina, a convincing conceptual design of the sailing infrastructure had to be presented.

In 2020, the contract for the modernisation project of Roucas Blanc Marina – *Marina Roucas Blanc for the 2024 Olympic Games* – was awarded to Jacques Rougerie from Tangram Architectes Associés and Carta from Reichen & Robert Associés. The project was supervised by Solideo, a specially appointed public institution that worked in parallel with the 2024 Olympic Games Committee. The difference between the two organisations lay in the scope of the investments they implemented or supervised. The Committee was responsible for temporary facilities used exclusively during the event, while Solideo was responsible for permanent infrastructure and permanent investments. The infrastructure implemented and supervised by Solideo, including the Roucas Blanc Marina, was to be converted into public facilities, starting in 2025. Environmentally advantageous characteristics of the newly designed Roucas Blanc Marina are described on the official Solideo website. The sports infrastructure is designed following the principles of sustainable development, using low-emission concrete and biological materials. The project achieved a silver rating and met the conditions for a gold rating according to the Sustainable Mediterranean Construction Commission. The marina has been awarded the EFFINATURE certificate (Société de Livraison des Ouvrages Olympiques, n.d.).

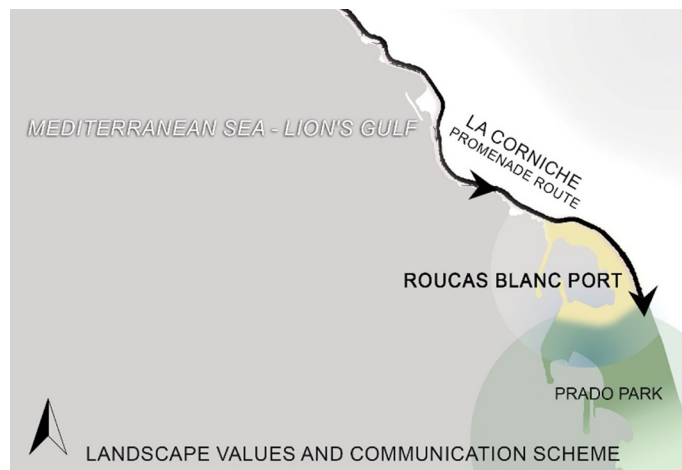
Based on the project *Marina Roucas Blanc for the 2024 Olympic Games*, a thorough modernisation of Roucas Blanc Marina was commenced. The former lack of a coherent plan for the layout of the port space resulted in the architecture and land use plan hindering smooth and safe communication. The storage and workshop space was unsuitable for storage and repairs of the evolving sailing equipment. Furthermore, the marina failed to blend visually with its surroundings. The Project Declaration documents and Public Tender Documentation for the *Marina Roucas Blanc for the 2024 Olympic Games* project outline solutions to these problems.

The port redevelopment project consisted of constructing five groups of buildings in the southern sector and modernising just one building in the northern sector. The buildings were designed in a radial layout around the sailing basin. Each building in the southern sector provided the necessary storage space. In one of them, namely Pole France Voile club headquarters, the height of the central part of the building was increased so that the competitors could bring their boats in without having to fold the masts. Two buildings called the “Technical Centre”, also being part of the southern sector, will be additionally dedicated to the workshop function relating to the repair of sailing equipment.

Smooth communication and safety inside the port were ensured by:

- designation of separate roads and gates with access control,
- fencing, selective entry and separation of technical traffic from pedestrian traffic,
- a special circuit for vehicles with trailers during sailing events.

According to the architectural concept, the low, predominantly two-storey facilities were to be harmoniously integrated into the surrounding area. This ensures that visitors to the port area have an unobstructed view of both the marina and the seascape.



**Figure 1. Landscape values and communication scheme**

Source: author's own elaboration.

Through the realisation of the project, the entire southern area (except the technical zone) will be made accessible to the public during the day. Before the modernisation, access to the coastline in the harbour area was impossible for residents and tourists. The newly modernised marina will be a tool in the development of sports and tourism, serving as a link connecting two recognisable areas of the

city: the Corniche promenade and Prado Park (Figure 1). Comprehensive architectural and spatial solutions regarding the efficiency and comfort of using Port Rocus Blanc will significantly contribute to strengthening the image of Marseille. According to official statistics, Marseille welcomed 16.2 million tourists in 2023 (covering both commercial and private accommodation). Preliminary estimates for 2024 suggest that, once non-commercial stays are included, this figure rose by 6 %, a trend confirmed by initial Flux Vision analyses (Office Métropolitain de Tourisme et des Congrès de Marseille, 2024; Provence Tourisme, 2025).

The modernisation of Roucas Blanc Marina as part of the Olympic sailing infrastructure in Marseille aligns with the implementation of several key strategic objectives pursued by the Euroméditerranée Urban Development Agency until 2030 (Établissement Public d’Aménagement Euroméditerranée, 2019), as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Summary of the Roucas Blanc Marina modernisation project characteristics and alignment with key objectives of the Marseille Euroméditerranée strategy**

<b>Strategic goals of Euroméditerranée</b>	<b>Features of modernisation of Roucas Blanc Marina in line with Euroméditerranée strategy</b>
Urban integration and waterfront development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Roucas Blanc Marina is becoming an important facility for seaside sports infrastructure.</li><li>– It facilitates access to the coast, integrating it into city life and improving the connection between the coastal areas and the rest of Marseille.</li></ul>
Sustainable development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– The marina has been modernised with environmentally friendly materials and energy-saving.</li><li>– The infrastructure was designed with a view to providing long-term use of the facilities (Olympic legacy), which aligns with the vision of an “eco-city”.</li></ul>
Strengthening of cultural and tourist aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– The organisation of the Olympic sailing competition strengthens the city’s international image.</li><li>– Once renovated, Marina Roucas Blanc will attract more sailing events, increasing tourist traffic and promoting Marseille as a sports and leisure centre.</li></ul>

Source: author’s own study based on the Euroméditerranée Strategy.

The implementation of investments in the port’s infrastructure constitutes an ambitious project in line with the broader strategy of the Economic Development Programme 2022–2027 for Marseille and the entire Aix-Marseille-Provence area and is founded on five key pillars (Métropole Aix-Marseille-Provence, 2022). These include the aim of increasing the attractiveness and international influence of the area. Providing infrastructure to enable the organisation of sailing competitions as part of the Olympic Games emphasises Marseille’s global image as a sports city.



The photo documentation created as a result of field research shows the architectural qualities of the Roucas Blanc Marina (Figures 2 and 3).



**Figure 2. Plan of Roucas Blanc Marina with key facilities and spots for taking photographs for surveys**

Source: author's own elaboration.



**Figure 3. Photographic documentation**

Source: author's own elaboration.

In the first photo, a large space for preparing equipment and wide slipways for launching or pulling boats ashore can be seen. The second photo shows the architectural simplicity of the Pôle France Voile club building. The building is high enough to allow yachts to be brought in without having to lower the mast. The third photo presents the harmonious integration into the surrounding context, achieved through the consistent design of the facade colour and building height. The fourth photo features the port buildings, which provide a clear view thanks to their predominantly two-storey design. The buildings of the frontage bordering the waterfront development can be easily seen from behind the Roucas Blanc Marina complex.

The questionnaire survey was conducted on a representative group of respondents. The survey was taken by coaches of the Polish national team who came to Marseille before the 2024 Olympic Games and used the facilities of the modernised Roucas Blanc Marina. Out of ten coaches, six participated in the survey, which represented 60% of the team.

The survey consisted of four questions: three close-ended questions requiring respondents to choose an answer from the available options, and one open-ended question (Figure 4). The unanimous response of all coaches to question 1 shows that, from their point of view, training camps abroad during periods of bad weather are absolutely necessary. According to the answers to question 2, all coaches who took part in the survey had the opportunity to stay at Roucas Blanc Marina, which means that they were able to comment on its functionality and architecture. Question 3 shows that the majority of coaches (67%) believe that it is worth returning to Marseille for training camps, not only for championship regattas. In answer to question 4, which was an open-ended question, the respondents emphasised that the port facilities of the marina, the storage and social infrastructure, the wide slipways for launching boats, and the fact that it is a “modern facility that meets all the criteria for specialised training” prompt them to use the port.

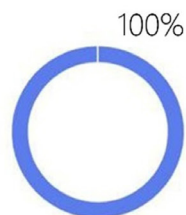
## 4. Discussion

The study focused on verifying the thesis that the architectural infrastructure of a sailing port influences the creation of the city’s image and can serve as a marketing tool to attract competitors and tourists. The results obtained from the analysis of design materials, photographic documentation and surveys conducted among sailing coaches indicate that the modernisation of Roucas Blanc Marina has a significant promotional and tourist potential. The modern and functional architectural solutions have been well received by users, which confirms the efforts of the

1. Do you go to training camps abroad? (apart from direct preparations for championship class regatta)

6 Answers

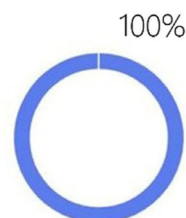
- Yes, because it gives you the opportunity to train when the weather conditions are not right in Poland (6)
- Yes, because you can take advantage of the well-designed infrastructure of the Sailing Base facilities (0)
- No, it is not necessary (0)



2. Did you know about the Roucas Blanc Sailing Stadium in Marseille before the Olympics?

6 Answers

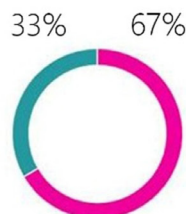
- Yes, I knew and I was at this Sailing Base. (6)
- Yes, I knew, but I didn't have the opportunity to visit this place before. (0)
- I did not know. (0)



3. Knowing that Port Roucas Blanc is an Olympic facility that meets the requirements of being the host of this event, would you choose to train here outside of the master class regatta?

6 Answers

- Yes, it is an attractive and worth checking out direction. (0)
- Yes, it is worth going there again. (4)
- No, it is not relevant to the racing class I sail/train on. (2)



4. What aspects of the architectural space of the Marseille Stadium do you find attractive and enticing people to use its facilities?

5 Answers

- Storage and social infrastructure and a hotel within the marina.
- A highly modern facility that meets the criteria for specialised training.
- Harbour, slip, sanitary facilities.
- Lots of greenery, simplicity, plenty of space.
- Wide boat launching ramp.

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**Figure 4. Presentation of survey results**

Source: author's own elaboration.

Marseille authorities to strengthen the city's international recognition. The strength of the analyses conducted lies in their multifaceted nature: both secondary sources (documents and planning materials) and primary sources (field research and surveys) were considered. In addition, a representative group of coaches provided valuable expert knowledge due to their specialised needs and experience in preparations for the Olympic Games. However, the study is limited insofar as the surveys were conducted among a small number of respondents (due to a low number of coaches in the team). Furthermore, the analysis was performed before the official start of the Olympic Games, making it impossible to fully capture the impact of this event on the further development of tourism and the image of Marseille.

The results of the above study correspond with the conclusions from the literature on the use of sports infrastructure as a tool for city promotion (Berg et al., 2002). In the case of Marseille, the study confirms that investments in modern sailing facilities can create a lasting legacy and are not limited to a single sporting event. However, it has also been shown that with no comprehensive and long-term maintenance and promotion measures, the marketing effect may be less pronounced, as research on ports and sailing events in other cities has shown (Collins et al., 2019).

The presented analysis is of practical importance as it can serve as a reference point for decision-makers in the planning or implementation of investments in coastal sports infrastructure. The identified key elements – such as the appropriate scale of development, smooth communication within the port, architectural coherence with the surroundings – may be regarded as guidelines for subsequent projects of this kind. Theoretically, this enriches the body of research on place marketing and the role of nautical infrastructure in creating the image of cities, especially those whose heritage and traditions are strongly connected to the sea.

Further long-term studies are recommended following the completion of the Olympic Games to capture the impact of the event itself on port utilisation, visitor numbers and benefits to local residents. It would be important to expand the sample group by including tourists, local entrepreneurs and other port users in the survey, as this would provide a more comprehensive picture of how the modernised infrastructure functions. In future studies, systematised evaluation tools (e.g. the Kano model, indicator analyses) can be introduced to measure the degree of user satisfaction and translate it into real economic and image-related benefits (Shen et al., 2021).

The study confirms that the modernisation of Roucas Blanc Marina is likely to contribute to creating the image of Marseille as an attractive sports and tourist centre, thereby supporting the city's development strategy. Further research, conducted over a longer period and involving more stakeholder groups, will help to consolidate these conclusions and develop even more effective methods with which to implement similar projects in other port cities.

## Conclusions

The conducted research revealed that the modernisation of Roucas Blanc Marina has had a favourable impact on Marseille's image, especially as a sports and tourist centre. Modern sailing infrastructure increases the city's recognition, constituting a coherent element of the promotional policy. The mixed method (document analysis, field observations, coach survey) in the study demonstrated the significant potential for the architectural design of the harbour.

From a theoretical point of view, the themes of architecture, sport and place marketing intertwine here. The Marseille authorities can benefit in the long term from a sustainable development concept and the continuation of promotional activities, as confirmed by experts from the sailing community. The relatively small number of coaches surveyed is a limitation, as is the lack of data following the Olympic Games. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that such investments can attract tourists and competitors, strengthening the city's economic and promotional potential. Further research should extend over a longer time frame and include a broader group of users. The port's modern character is not limited to the sporting event itself – it has the potential to provide lasting added value for the development of Marseille, emphasising its connection to the sea and strengthening the city's international brand.

It is essential to recognise that the pursuit of comprehensive economic self-sufficiency was not a core objective of the marina initiative (Ville de Marseille, 2023, 2024). Instead, the facility is designated for educational and athletic applications. The program *Tous les Marseillais sur l'eau* aims to offer mandatory sailing instruction to 11,000 primary school students annually at this harbour. Coupled with its Effinature certification and collaborations with the French Sailing Federation and private sector sponsors, the Marseille marina aligns with the guidelines set forth by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) Legacy and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). This positions the project with a favourable social impact, despite the anticipated reliance on partial operational subsidies (International Olympic Committee, 2021; OECD, 2010). Historical examples from the Olympic ports in Barcelona (1992) and London (2012) indicate that similar facilities can act as catalysts for waterfront revitalisation, sports education and tourism, thereby avoiding the pitfalls of becoming "white elephants" (Berg et al., 2002; Sadd & Nguyen, 2023). However, prior experiences and existing literature delineate that such outcomes are not assured. This is exemplified by the Olympic port in Rio (2016), where Brazil experienced its most severe economic downturn during the lead-up to the Games (Neri, 2020).

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