

“WHY ISTANBUL NOW?” TURKEY’S BID FOR THE 2020 OLYMPIC AND PARALMPIC GAMES

Istanbul has been a physical and philosophical bridge for millennia. The needs of the city and the capacity of the nation have never been more closely aligned with the demands of hosting the Games and the vision of the Olympic Movement. If Istanbul was to host the Games, for the first time in Olympic history the world’s premier event would be staged in a country where 50 percent of the population is under-25. The region’s first Olympic and Paralympic Games will have an unparalleled impact on the social development of the young generation: the greatest benefit of all for Turkey, the region, and the Olympic Movement.

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I have been travelling the world for over two years now, leading Istanbul's campaign to host the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games. From day one, the city has been the star: 8,000 years of history at the point where the continents meet; a physical and philosophical bridge connecting East and West, tradition and innovation, ambition and capacity. Napoleon once said that if the world was a single country, then Istanbul would be its capital. In many ways it is a city that sells itself; after all, 12 million international visitors a year cannot all be wrong.

For this Olympic bid, the city's fifth in total, the Bid Committee has now combined Istanbul's undisputable majesty with a robust Games plan and proven delivery mechanisms. When I am asked by members of the Olympic Family, "Why Istanbul?" I am not short of possible responses. But the key is not just making a compelling argument for taking the Games to Istanbul; it is making a compelling argument for taking the Games to Istanbul in 2020.



So, "Why Istanbul now?" Quite simply, because the needs of the city and the capacity of the nation have never been more closely aligned with the demands of hosting the Games and the vision of the Olympic Movement. Istanbul 2020 is built on a unique set of circumstances. It is the product of some very specific priorities and opportunities for Turkey and our region. Crucially, many of those priorities and opportunities mirror those of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), none more closely or more pertinently than the question of engaging young people.

The population of Turkey is the youngest in Europe. We have 31 million under-25s, many of whom are part of a growing and upwardly-mobile middle class. 700,000 people graduate from universities every year in Turkey. It is the same story across the region and an increasingly global phenomenon, where young people are not just our futures – they are the majority, right here, right now.

These are well-educated, aspirational global citizens with a social conscience. They care deeply about the way our world is evolving and, as we saw in Turkey in June,

they are ready to stand up and make their voices heard to keep that evolution on the right path. When I speak to young people in my home city, Istanbul, they seem to feel a greater social responsibility –and a greater potential– than I or any of my contemporaries felt at the same age. It is the older generation's duty to empower them, so they may satisfy their sense of responsibility and realize their full potential, to help them shape their futures, and to guarantee them harmony and opportunity. That duty is one of the most pressing issues facing Turkey and many countries around the world right now. It is also one of the core motivations behind our bid for the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

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With young people demanding a place at the top of the global agenda, it is no coincidence that “Olympism and Youth” was identified as one of the Olympic Movement's five most pressing priorities at the last IOC Congress in Copenhagen in 2009. The conclusions of the Congress reveal unequivocally just how much importance the IOC is placing in maintaining the relevance of the Olympic Movement in the lives of young people: “The youth of the world, from whom the athletes of the future are drawn, are (...) at the heart of the Olympic Movement. Effective communication of the fundamental principles and values of Olympism to young people is essential and its benefits are overwhelming.”¹

So how can this huge young population's harmony and opportunity be guaranteed? How do we promote a healthy, active lifestyle over a sedentary one? How do we make sure the next generation chooses friendship, excellence and respect over discord, or even radicalism?

Turkey, taking its inspiration from the Olympic Movement –as it has done ever since Atatürk laid out the founding principles of the Republic in 1923– found its answer in sport. The country is one of the few in the world to have its citizens' fundamental right to play sport enshrined in its national Constitution. After the last decade of spectacular advancements in education and health care, Turkey's National Sports Plan was initiated by the government, which focused on delivering the next social imperative: sport.

¹ “XIII Olympic Congress: Follow-Up,” *International Olympic Committee* (2009), http://www.olympic.org/Documents/Congress_2009/XIII-Olympic-Congress_Follow-up_EN.pdf

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The Plan provides for an investment of 500 million dollars every year in sports participation and development programs nationwide. These programs are aimed at introducing young people to the full spectrum of Olympic sports for the first time. The approach is partially to diversify Turkey’s medal hopes at the elite level, but primarily in recognition of the fact that not being tall enough for basketball or agile enough for football should not preclude a child from experi-

encing the joy of friendly competition. If sportsmen and women come in all shapes and sizes, so must our provision for sport. Another stated aim of the National Sports Plan is mainstreaming Paralympic sport for the first time in Turkey. The early signs are positive, especially following our most successful Paralympic Games ever at London 2012, but in a nation that is home to eight million people with a disability, there is a great deal of work to do to bring Turkey in line with top-tier sports nations.

The National Sports Plan is being run in parallel with another ambitious government investment program. In the next two years alone, 2.5 billion dollars will be spent on 25 elite-level stadia and 693 community sports facilities all over Turkey.

Turkey is certainly on the right path with these programs. But bringing the Olympic and Paralympic Games to Turkey for the first time in history would guarantee the Plan the impetus and the international profile to ensure the development it catalyzes will change the lives not just of this young generation, but of many more future generations.

Istanbul 2020 will contribute hard legacies and soft legacies to Turkey’s long-term sporting landscape. Chief among the hard legacies, of course, will be a raft of sorely-needed state of the art sports facilities. The design of our Athletes’ Village for the 2020 Games is revolutionary, co-locating an on-site Olympic Training Center and Athlete Recovery Center for the first time. That will mean virtually eliminating pre-competition travel for all athletes, who spend nearly 80 percent of their time either in the Village or at training and recovery facilities. But the implications for legacy mode are even more impressive: a cutting-edge live-work-play community to serve an “Olympic City” of 600,000 residents, complete with new apartments, commercial buildings and –critically– low- or no-cost sports facilities. The Olympic

Training Center will become a multi-sport high-performance hub – the first of its kind in the region and a vital stepping stone towards seeing more Turkish athletes winning more medals in more disciplines. It will be the first center of excellence in Turkey for many Olympic sports and almost every Paralympic sport.



New golf and equestrian centers in the Esenler Cluster will make those sports available beyond the social elite for the first time, both in affordability and, on a practical level, as the only golf and equestrian facilities accessible from the city center by public transport. In fact, every one of our permanent new *venues* has a long-term strategy already in place to maximize its legacy yield.

We have learned a great deal from London 2012's outstanding Games last summer, which in my opinion, was one of the very best in modern times. First and foremost is that you cannot overstate the importance of outstanding sports presentation when it comes to grabbing and holding the attention of a young audience. It is hard to quantify, but I have no doubt that road cycling's climax past Buckingham Palace and down the Mall will have made a significant contribution to the sport's boom in popularity among amateurs in the last year. Beach volleyball at Horse Guards Parade and equestrian at Greenwich Park must have had a similarly invigorating effect, not to mention LOCOG's² innovative approach to using lighting and audio-visual support in the indoor arenas.

Put simply, a great setting makes for great sport, and great sport is the best way to inspire an increase in mass participation. That is the logic behind activating the entire city of Istanbul in our Games plan: Europe and Asia, ancient and modern, art deco and Ottoman. Rowers will race past the Maiden's Tower; cyclists will speed alongside 1,500 year-old city walls; marathon runners will cross continents over the Bosphorus Bridge; rugby players will take aim for Asia when they kick for a goal from Europe. These are the cinematic images that will capture the imagination of a generation. Through a commitment to breathtaking sports presentation, Istanbul 2020 will stimulate a dramatic rise in mass sports participation, and the entire region –and beyond– will reap the rewards from grass-roots upwards.

² The London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

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Istanbul 2020 would have a tangible impact on Turkish sport’s fight against doping. Unfortunately, recent high-profile cases around the world show that this is still a global issue, and Turkey is no exception. But more cases over the last two months do not mean more cheats: they mean Turkey’s more concerted and much more aggressive anti-doping policy is helping us to eradicate drugs from sport.

Hosting the Games will accelerate this process through a nationwide Olympic education program aimed at young athletes at every level. This will utilize funding unlocked in the Olympic budget to teach the next generation of aspiring Olympians and Paralympians of the dangers and the illegality of performance enhancing drugs. At the same time, Istanbul 2020 will continue working with the National Olympic Committee of Turkey to eliminate the temptation or the imagined need for drugs. Together, we will provide these young athletes with better routes to fulfilling their potential than they have ever had before: high-quality sports facilities, world-class coaching, access to cutting-edge sports medicine and recovery facilities, and role models who have succeeded by following the right path.

In parallel, the national government will continue to support Turkish sports authorities in punishing convicted cheats to the full extent of our comprehensive anti-doping legislation. Young Turkish sportsmen and sportswomen must be left with no doubt that if they want to realize the ultimate dream of every athlete –an Olympic medal on home soil– they must compete clean. There is nowhere to hide and there is no place for cheats in Turkey’s Olympic story.

So finally I come to the soft legacies – the more intangible effects of hosting the Games in a region where 50 percent of the population is under-25, for the first time in Olympic history. Sport and the Istanbul 2020 Olympic bid have united young people behind a singular vision for a better Turkey. Our most recent domestic poll put support for the bid in Istanbul at 94 percent. That equates to over five million young people in one city alone who want to bring the Games to Turkey.

Istanbul 2020 will motivate and mobilize our youth by creating a generation of opportunities. As the nation builds towards both the centennial of the Republic in 2023 and the greatest sporting event on the planet in 2020, Turkey will be a hotbed

of young innovators and thriving entrepreneurs. Istanbul 2020 will involve local start-ups in making meaningful contributions to Games delivery, and in so doing create a fresh cohort of young leaders in sport, business, engineering, the media and volunteerism.

From a business perspective, I envisage the seven-year build-up to the Games creating a step-change in the Turkish psyche. When the last fireworks faded in Beijing in 2008, the world was left in no doubt that China had arrived at the global top table. As an Olympic host nation, we Turks will not be aspiring to international standards – we will be setting new ones. “Made in Turkey” will be synonymous with cutting-edge excellence and raising the bar.

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Clearly, improving where and how often young people in Turkey play sport will have a significant impact on their social development. But for me, more significant still is the spirit in which they play sport. Istanbul 2020 will connect Turkey and the surrounding region with the full power of the Olympic Movement for the first time. I firmly believe that this will create an environment where values like respect, tolerance, understanding, and fair play are more central in young people’s lives. In a world undergoing enormous social evolution at a dizzying pace, the Olympic Values can provide a guiding North Star for our children.

What about Istanbul 2020’s other Olympic first – the first ever Games to be hosted on two continents simultaneously? It is a captivating narrative, one made for television and digital media. But it is the symbolic significance of hosting the Games in Europe and in Asia at the same time that provides –for me at least– the most compelling answer to “Why Istanbul now?” By staging the Games where the continents meet, Istanbul 2020 will embody the unifying values of the Olympic Movement with a seminal celebration of harmony in diversity. By bringing that celebration to a new part of the world, the Olympic Movement will be embracing our region’s young people for the first time.

The Games will be their bridge into a more harmonious global community; Istanbul 2020 will give millions of young people a reason to make the right decisions right now.



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