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## **OLYMPIC URBANISM IN TALLINN: PREPARATIONS FOR THE 1980 OLYMPIC REGATTA**

The construction programme that accompanied the sailing regatta of the XXII Olympic Games, has turned into one of the largest urban development projects of contemporary Estonian history. Although Moscow was the official organiser of the Olympic Games, out of many other cities, Tallinn was chosen to be the co-host.<sup>1</sup> This was accompanied by an impressive construction programme, involving over a hundred objects from sports venues and infrastructure to cultural facilities and housing. The construction that came with the Olympic Regatta cannot be regarded purely as a creation of sports-related building stock, but it was an extensive urban renewal that fits under the international definition of Olympic urbanism. Tallinn is an example of a precedent in the history of modern Olympic Games, where the co-host city experiences a construction plan as extensive as is usually reserved for the Olympic cities.

The urban development plans and their implementation for the 1980 Tallinn Regatta may be examined against the background of the development processes typical of Olympic cities, which are

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1 Riga, St. Petersburg (Leningrad, back then), Odessa and Pitsunda, and according to some reports, Sevastopol and at some stage also Klaipeda, were also in contention to become the city of the 1980 Olympic Regatta. See Bruno Saul, *Meie aeg: mälestused* (Tallinn: Maalehe Raamat, 2006), 161.

characterised by strategic and staged urban planning. This article places the construction of the Tallinn Olympic Regatta in the context of the intersection of the Soviet occupation, political propaganda, and the desire of Estonian architects and planners to modernise urban space.

This study of the urban development of the Tallinn Olympic Regatta has extensively relied on sources from archives and museum collections,<sup>2</sup> one of the merits of this piece is that it highlights and studies different archive and museum collection sources, linking and analysing them for the first time. In addition, the methods of oral history played an important role in the linking of the sources of the thesis as well as this article. Considering that the 1980 Olympic Regatta was an event of contemporary local history, with which many people have personal experiences, the author of the article conducted fourteen<sup>3</sup> semi-structured interviews.

### THE CONCEPT OF OLYMPIC URBANISM AND ITS CORRESPONDENCE TO THE DEVELOPMENT MODELS OF OLYMPIC CITIES

Since the birth of modern Olympic Games in 1894, in addition to the sports events, substantial urban development plans have also been in the limelight. The organisation of Olympic Games is associated with extensive developments, and investments in local employment, healthcare, environment, housing, communities, and other social areas concomitant with it.<sup>4</sup> Preparations for Olympic Games can be compared to other mega-events,<sup>5</sup> such as world expos, large cultural festivals and fairs, whose organisation demands large investments in urban planning. Often, the goals that guide the development of

2 During the research, relevant collections in the National Archives of Estonia, Tallinn City Archive, Museum of Estonian Architecture, archive of Estonian Public Broadcasting, and personal archives have been studied.

3 Interviews were conducted with persons involved with the preparations of the 1980 Olympic Regatta, incl. architects, interior architects, organisers, sailors, journalists, etc.

4 Jon Coaffee, "Urban Regeneration and Renewal", *Olympic Cities. City Agendas, Planning and the World's Games, 1896–2016*, ed. by John R. Gold, Margaret M. Gold (London, New York: Routledge, 2011), 181.

5 The term 'mega-event' was first used for the 1851 Great Exhibition in London. See Valerio Della Sala, *The Olympic Villages and Olympic Urban Planning*. Doctoral thesis (Barcelona, Torino: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and Politecnico di Torino, 2022), 94.

Olympic cities relate to gaining international attention, attracting investments, and renewing the image of the city. The staging of the Olympic Games is a meaning-making process whereby the city itself becomes part of the spectacle next to sport and culture.<sup>6</sup>

The urban planning that accompanies the Olympics is a phenomenon in parallel with regular urban regeneration, playing an important role in the history of urban development.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, this article also considers the Tallinn urban development of the 1970s within the framework of Olympic urbanism. Olympic urbanism signifies the constructional renewal of the city accompanying the Olympic Games, which is usually conducted under accelerated circumstances, and the relevant objects must be erected officially over five to six years. Olympic urbanism focuses primarily on the building stock required for a sports event – chiefly, it is important to have the facilities in which to hold the Olympic Games competitions, but changes affecting the rest of the city are generally planned along with these. Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympic Games, already determined, in general terms, which buildings are needed to host the games. New sports facilities, buildings necessary for receiving guests, such as hotels, communication facilities, shops, cultural and entertainment venues, and infrastructure are developed in the host city.<sup>8</sup> The building types associated with Olympic construction have remained largely the same till today, but their scope has changed. The main impeller for the construction is the large masses of people (athletes, journalists, spectators, staff, teams, etc.), who are expected to participate in the sports event.

Wide-ranging urban regeneration is particular to the host city primarily, but the International Olympic Committee (IOC) realised as early as in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that very few cities would be able to organise all events in the Olympic programme, which is why they started hosting some events, such as rowing or sailing, in other cities, which would also undergo constructional preparation.

6 *Olympic Cities. City Agendas, Planning and the World's Games, 1896–2016*, ed. by John R. Gold, Margaret M. Gold (London, New York: Routledge, 2011), 12–17.

7 Brian Chalkley, Stephen Essex, "Urban Development through Hosting International Events: A History of the Olympic Games", *Planning Perspectives*, 14 (4) (London: Routledge, 1999), 370.

8 Martin Wimmer, *Bauten der Olympischen Spiele* (Leipzig: Edition Leipzig, 1975), 23.

According to the rules of the IOC, those cities are known as co-hosts,<sup>9</sup> but not as straightforward Olympic cities.

Many scholars of Olympic construction have divided the history of Olympic construction into phases, with the five-phase system being most prevalent, which is what this article is also based on.<sup>10</sup> The Moscow Olympic Games and Tallinn Sailing Regatta represent the third phase of Olympic construction, which lasted from 1960 to 1988. That period is characterised by using the Olympic Games as an implement of executing visions of urban development, extensive modernisation of cities, and shaping of political images. We may recognise a tendency in the third phase where cities wished to participate in the organising of Summer Olympics because it meant extensive urban construction, which has been referred to as the catalyst of urban development.<sup>11</sup> The same tendencies are evident in the preparations for the Tallinn Olympic Regatta.

Authoritarian regimes use Olympic construction as a symbol of power, and architecture serves as a tool of ideology. According to Guy Debord's theory of the society of the spectacle, Olympic architecture is a tool of communication, through which the host state presents its deliberately curated image to both internal and external audiences.<sup>12</sup> Similar trend was evident also at the Moscow Olympic Games, in terms of city planning and architecture as well as in the ideological structure of the games. The aim was to stage a positive image of life in the Soviet Union, but it was not an accurate representation of the actual situation.

#### TALLINN AS THE CITY OF THE OLYMPIC REGATTA: POLITICAL DECISION AND ARCHITECTURAL BACKGROUND

The selection of Tallinn as the venue of the sailing regatta of the 1980 Summer Olympics was not accidental, but the result of preparations

9 "TRA 10 – Other Olympic Cities", *Host City Contract. Operational Requirements* (Lausanne: International Olympic Committee, 2017), 138.

10 E.g. Martin Wimmer, Brian Chalkley, Stephen Essex, and Valerio della Sala.

11 Brian Chalkley, Stephen Essex, "Learning from the Olympic Games", *Teaching Geography*, 25 (3) (2000), 115.

12 Anne-Marie Broudehoux, *The Making and Selling of Post-Mao Beijing* (London, New York: Routledge, 2004), 58.

and cooperation that had been underway between several parties since the early 1970s. The Piritä River mouth and Tallinn Bay were chosen as the more specific locations – sailing had been practiced there for decades, and the Piritä River mouth had also been dredged with a purpose-built pump. Although the designation of Tallinn as the sailing city was only officially confirmed in 1974, after Moscow was selected as the Olympic city, the urban development plans had already been established by then. The planning combined the desire for the renewal of urban environment, the shaping of the image of the Soviet Union, and the practical need to receive and serve guests.

The first serious step in the preparations for the Olympic Regatta was the planning of Piritä,<sup>13</sup> which was in the works since 1972, as a part of that, a leisure and sports centre was planned for Piritä, which would have been built even without the regatta.<sup>14</sup> This mandate was followed by the preparation of the Piritä master plan, which, in addition to the construction of the sports centre, also included the design principles for the 643-hectare area between Piritä and the city centre. A bathing beach was planned for the central part of Piritä, and the yacht club was to remain in its original location nearby.<sup>15</sup> The planned location of the Piritä Olympic Yachting Centre was on the south shore of Tallinn Bay, and that is where that Olympic building was erected by 1980. The planning for the Piritä recreation zone would have been implemented even if the Olympic Regatta had never happened in Tallinn. Nonetheless, a note was added to the official projects that the decision on the finalised project was dependent on the IOC's decision regarding their choice of the Olympic city of 1980.<sup>16</sup>

In October 1974, at the IOC conference in Vienna, Moscow was chosen as the Olympic city and Tallinn thereby as the co-host. In the sailing city of Tallinn, the preparation of the urban development plan 'Tallinn-80' began immediately.<sup>17</sup> The project envisaged the construction of 92 objects by the summer of 1980. In addition to buildings, the plan also included the planning of the Old Town

13 Piritä is a region of Tallinn in today's Piritä city district.

14 Personal archive of Sulev Roosma: Order of the Council of Ministers of the ESSR, no. 184-k, 31/03/1972, copy.

15 Dmitri Bruns, *Tallinn valmistub olümpiaaks* (Tallinn: Perioodika, 1979), 40.

16 Personal archive of Sulev Roosma: protocol of the meeting of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers of the ESSR, 29/01/1973. Copy.

17 Project was compiled at the design institute of Estonian Project, architect Lorenz Haljak.

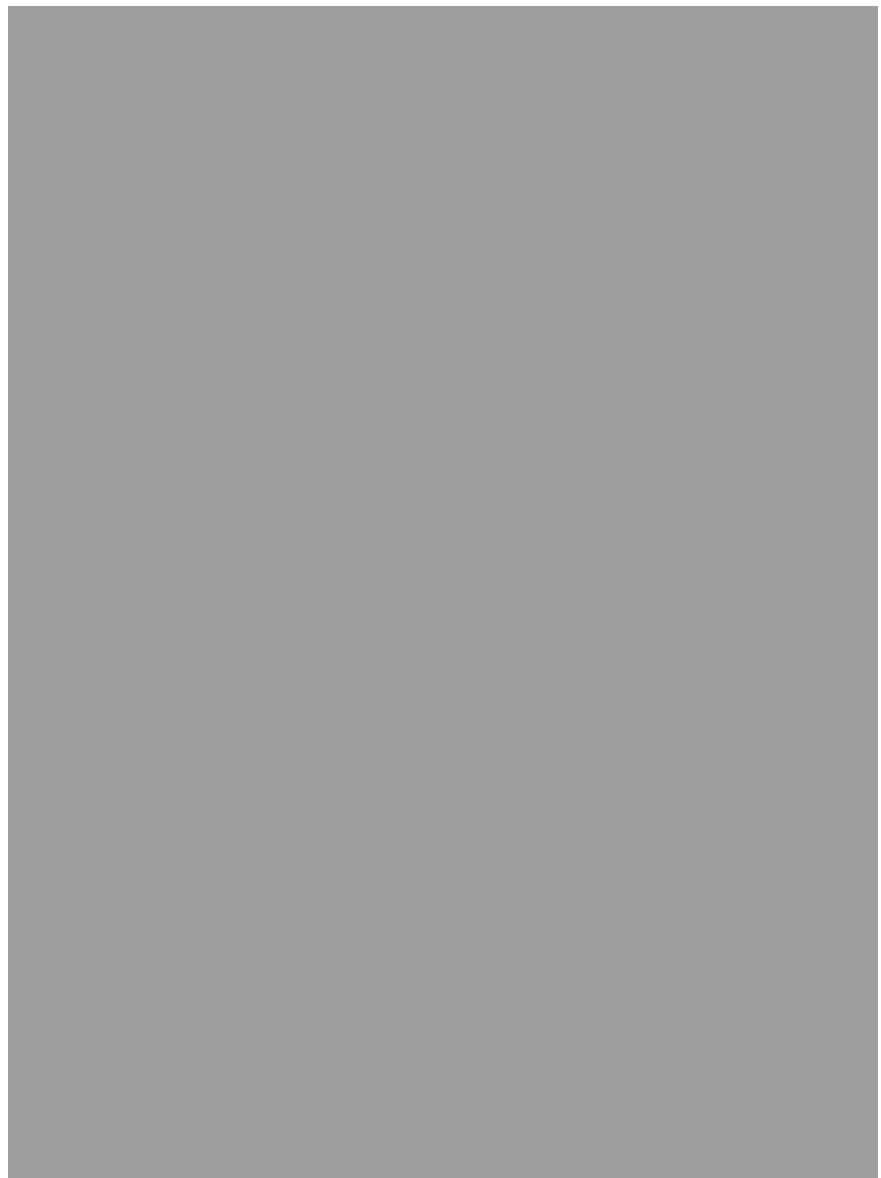


FIG. 1. 'TALLINN-80', THE CONSTRUCTION PLAN OF THE TALLINN OLYMPIC REGATTA, PLANNING FOR THE CITY CENTRE, 1974. NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF ESTONIA.

and the development of infrastructure both in Tallinn and on the main national roads (Fig. 1).<sup>18</sup> These development plans are largely

18 National Archives of Estonia [Rahvusarhiiv, RA], ERA.T-14.4-6.9011, 12–15.

consistent with the Tallinn General Plan approved in 1971: common elements include, for example, developing infrastructure, tidying up the city centre and considering its various functions, as well as conveying wastewater, and moving industry out of the city centre.<sup>19</sup> The Olympic construction project outlines major planned construction and repair works, and restoration plans, by building types. According to the calculations by Estonian Project (in Estonian: Riiklik Projekteerimisinstituut Eesti Projekt), approximately 20,000–33,000 foreign guests and 180,000–200,000 tourists from the Soviet Union were expected to participate in the sailing regatta, and 300,000 foreign tourists were expected to take part in the entire programme of the Moscow Olympic Games, but less than half of them turned up because of the boycott.<sup>20</sup> The actual figures were many times smaller in Tallinn, also – only 154 sailors from 23<sup>21</sup> (21 according to other sources<sup>22</sup>) countries participated in the regatta, and the numbers of spectators, especially foreign visitors, were considerably smaller than expected.<sup>23</sup>

Comparing archival sources and urban development plans retrospectively, it has become clear that hosting the Olympic Regatta contributed to the implementation of the city's master plan, as Tallinn had hitherto been relatively backward in terms of its general appearance, functionality and transport.<sup>24</sup> When we evaluate the broad scope of the 'Tallinn-80' project, it becomes clear that the intention was to show Tallinn's visitors a new and shining city, which the architects and authors of the project seemed to be staging. According to Anne-Marie Broudehoux, one of the main roles of the spectacle is to increase the state's visibility in urban space.<sup>25</sup> However, this was not the direct goal of the building plan; rather, some of the

19 Estonian Museum of Architecture [Eesti Arhitektuurimuuseum, EAM], EAM.4.1.95.

20 Pauli Heikkilä, "Sailing in an Occupied Country: Protests by Estonian Emigrants Against the 1980 Olympic Regatta", *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 32 (11–12) (2015), 1474.

21 To compare, 30 countries with about 300 sailors participated in the 1979 Baltic Regatta, or the so-called dress rehearsal for the Olympics. See Maarika Lauri, *Olümpiatuli Tallinnas. 40. aastat hiljem*, television show (Tallinn: Eesti Televisioon, 2020).

22 "Kolmandik oodatust Tallinnas", *Eesti Päevaleht*, 02.08.1980.

23 Külli Arjakas, "Moskva olümpiamängude purjeregatt Tallinnas", *Tallinna ajalugu IV, 1917–2019*, comp. by Olev Liivik, ed. by Tiina Kala (Tallinn: Tallinna Linnaarhiiv, 2019), 314.

24 Leonid Volkov, "Linna generaalplaani põhijooni", *Tallinna arengu probleeme*, comp. by Helmut Paalberg (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1978), 75.

25 Broudehoux, "Images of Power", 52.

objects were also intended to improve the lives of the city's residents. Since it was a project prepared at the local level, it appears that the aim was to make Tallinn more Western or Scandinavian, and the Olympic Regatta provided a favourable opportunity for that.

The 'Tallinn-80' plan is followed by a list by the Central Committee of the Estonian Communist Party and the Council of Ministers of the ESSR, which names 84 objects to be constructed, ten restoration works, and 30 simpler renovation projects in various hospitality and catering businesses.<sup>26</sup> This is a total of 124 Olympic Regatta-linked objects, which include buildings directly associated with the regatta, as well as many other objects to support the general development of Tallinn. Tallinn's Olympic building plan included not only sailing-related objects, but also living areas, hotels and accommodation units, engineering-technical infrastructure, and many cultural facilities. The plan did not focus solely on the construction of individual buildings but engaged with a strategic reorganisation of urban space. It is important to emphasise that the construction of the Tallinn Olympic Regatta was not subjected to the usual planning logic but followed a special program where the party leadership and the pooling of construction resources enabled operations on an incomparably larger scale than in everyday ESSR practice.

The urban development plans accompanying the Olympic Regatta have been repeatedly referred to as a creation of a kind of false city, or city-staging,<sup>27</sup> as they were trying to hide the backwardness and deficiencies of Soviet Union life in front of the guests from Western countries.<sup>28</sup> This in turn means putting on an urban development spectacle for the outside world, highlighting the buildings and areas which were meant to shape the image.<sup>29</sup> Since culture and sport are widely popular, it is possible to steer the city's image in a desired direction through buildings associated with them, and gain wider attention.<sup>30</sup> The city planning maps of the time show that this was only one aspect of it, but the objects planned across the city still had

26 RA, ERA.R.-2002.1.441a, 21–40.

27 The term 'Potemkin village' would be suitable here, too, as it signifies an embellished vision of reality, especially in urban development.

28 Karin Hallas-Murula, "Kallion. Tallinn: Tallinna väljaehitamine olümpiaaks 1971–1979", *Sirp*, 05.08.2016.

29 Broudehoux, "Images of Power", 52

30 Guy Debord, *Vaatemängühiskond* (Tallinn: Tallinna Ülikooli Kirjastus 2013), 13.

a significant impact on the local population. The organisers of the sailing regatta have generalised that it was a huge developmental leap from Tallinn's point of view, which was accompanied by the expansion of the city and its connection to the Pirita and Viimsi districts on the shores of Tallinn Bay. Although on the whole, the Olympic Regatta was a propaganda event, the organisers and those responsible for the construction were still engineers, designers and architects who saw a favourable opportunity in the situation, because otherwise such money for urban development would probably not have come from anywhere.<sup>31</sup> Tallinn has not experienced similar large-scale urban development since the Olympic Regatta, because a small nation does not generally have the financial means for that.

### THE SCALE AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OLYMPIC BUILDING PROGRAMME

During the writing of the master's thesis on which this article is based, the entire construction order related to the Olympic Regatta, construction plans that were discussed in one way or another, objects to be demolished, and infrastructure development have been mapped based on archival sources. The mapping revealed that a total of 124 objects were planned, of which at least 47 were completed during the Tallinn Olympic construction.<sup>32</sup> The aim of the construction programme accompanying the Tallinn Olympic Regatta was not only to erect the buildings necessary for sports events, but also to modernise the general appearance of the city and improve its image. The planned objects could be divided into several types: straightforward sports facilities (e.g. Pirita Olympic Yachting Centre), cultural buildings (e.g. Tallinn's Linnahall), communication and transport amenities (e.g. Tallinn's Central Post Office, new airport terminal), residential buildings, accommodation units, shops, entertainment facilities and other infrastructure. The construction programme for the 1980 sailing regatta is broadly divided into two groups – one includes buildings and facilities whose purpose was to serve sailing regatta-related events and participants; the other

31 Tiit Nuudi, interview. Conducted by the author, 06.11.2023. Recording in possession of author.

32 Some objects were finished a lot later, some at different locations and under new names, which is why it is difficult to know the exact number.

group involves objects that are indirectly connected to the sailing regatta but were built in the tailwind of the preparations. The urban development set out in the master plan was ongoing in parallel, following the established planning idea and design brief.<sup>33</sup>

The standard programme for Olympic urbanism prescribes that the buildings of primary importance are the sports centres and complexes, where the competitions in the Olympic programme are held.<sup>34</sup> In Tallinn, too, they differentiated between projects that were directly associated with the Olympics and the concomitant ones, which in turn dictated the division of finances. The special means set aside for the Olympic Regatta<sup>35</sup> covered the construction of 14 objects, which included the building of the most important object – the Piritä Olympic Yachting Centre, and the reconstruction of the Yacht Harbour<sup>36</sup> (Fig. 2–5). The Olympic finances were used to partially cover the construction of Linnahall, Hotel Olümpia and the Piritä shopping centre.<sup>37</sup> Road construction, establishment of engineering networks, and water and sewerage systems that helped to improve the living conditions considerably, where important from the perspective of the everyday lives of locals. When it comes to Olympic construction, the development of infrastructure is almost always significant, whether it be new roads, traffic junctions, pedestrian areas, tunnels, parking lots, or other mobility-related facilities. Although the development and construction of infrastructure has been considered the third most important element in the Olympic construction programme,<sup>38</sup> it is one of the primary lasting urban development outcomes left behind by the organisation of a large-

33 Della Sala, *The Olympic Villages and Olympic Urban Planning*, 16.

34 Wimmer, *Bauten der Olympischen Spiele*, 30.

35 The allocated finances were not enough and they often had to go and ask for more from Moscow. Personal archive of Krista Kodres: Andres Saar, recorded memories. Excerpts in possession of the author.

36 Architects Avo-Himm Looveer, Peep Jänes, Hanno Sepmann, Ants Raid, Matti Õunapuu, Kristin Looveer, Ilmar Heinsoo, Alar Oruhee, Aulo Padar, Leo Leesaar, Vello Asi, Väino Tamm, Juta Lember, Kirsti Laanemaa.

37 Aap Mumme, “Olümpiaehitusprogramm Tallinnas X viisaastakul kui osa Eesti NSV kapitaalehituse plaanist”, *Olümpiaehitised Tallinnas*, comp. by Henn Saarmann. Eesti NSV Ministrite Nõukogu juures asuv Kehakultuuri- ja Spordikomitee, 1980.aasta Moskva Olümpiamängude Organiseerimiskomitee Tallinna osakond, Eesti Informatsiooni Instituut (Tallinn: Eesti NSV Kehakultuuri- ja Spordikomitee, 1977), 10.

38 Wimmer, *Bauten der Olympischen Spiele*, 30.



FIG. 2. PLAN OF THE PIRITA OLYMPIC YACHTING CENTRE. 1979. PUBLISHED IN EHITUS JA ARHITEKTUUR, 2 (1979).

1 – YACHT CLUB; 2 – CONNECTION TO THE YACHT CLUB; 3 – SLIPS; 4 – WORKSHOPS; 5 – WORKSHOPS; 6 – PRESS CENTRE; 7 – CHURCH; 8 – OLYMPIC VILLAGE, LATER HOTEL; 9 – CATERING AREA; 10 – SWIMMING POOL; 11 – SPORTS CENTRE; 12 – OLYMPIC CAULDRON; 13 – CEREMONIAL GROUNDS.



FIG. 3. CONSTRUCTION OF THE PIRITA OLYMPIC YACHTING CENTRE, 1978–1979. PHOTO: AUTHOR UNKNOWN, ESTONIAN MUSEUM OF ARCHITECTURE.



FIG. 4. PIRITA OLYMPIC YACHTING CENTRE. C. 1980. AUTHOR UNKNOWN, ESTONIAN MUSEUM OF ARCHITECTURE.



FIG. 5. THE WINNING TEAM OF THE PIRITA OLYMPIC YACHTING CENTRE ARCHITECTURE COMPETITION, FROM THE LEFT, LEONHARD LAPIN, TIIT KALJUNDI, MATTI ÕUNAPUU, HARRY ŠEIN, AVO-HIMM LOOVEER IN THE FRONT. THE TEAM OF THE WINNING PROJECT 'UNCLE' WAS LATER REPLACED BY ARCHITECTS PEEP JÄNES, HENNO SEPPEMANN AND ANTS RAID, AVO-HIMM LOOVEER FROM THE INITIAL GROUP ALSO STAYED WITH THE PROJECT. IT IS ONE OF THE MOST POLEMICISED ARCHITECTURE COMPETITIONS IN THE LOCAL HISTORY OF ARCHITECTURE. SECOND HALF OF THE 1970S. PHOTO: PRIVATE COLLECTION.



FIG. 6. PLAN OF THE PIRITA ROAD. RENÉ PALIS. SECOND HALF OF THE 1970S. PUBLISHED IN *EHITUS JA ARHITEKTUUR*, 2 (1979).

scale event in the host city.<sup>39</sup> In Estonia, the inner-city roads and routes were reviewed in the run-up to the sailing regatta, and the national highway network was also renovated.

In Tallinn, infrastructure plans included redesigning the arterial and street networks of the city centre to improve inner-city mobility.<sup>40</sup> Perhaps the most well-known infrastructure development related to the regatta is the expansion of Pirita Road. The road itself was built at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, previously people travelled over Maarjamäe, as Tallinn Bay extended directly to the foot of the coastal slope.<sup>41</sup> The reconstruction of the roads leading to Pirita during the Olympic Regatta was called the inner-city Olympic Road (Fig. 6). The construction of a new bridge was a separate project under the construction of Pirita Road (Fig. 7–8).<sup>42</sup> Several road construction plans remained unimplemented, but when they were drawn up, there was a desire to demolish several buildings from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which would have destroyed the historical milieu of certain areas of the city.<sup>43</sup> Given what we know today, it is probably good that these plans were not implemented.

39 Chalkley, Essex, "Learning from the Olympic Games", 4.

40 Dmitri Bruns, *Tallinn – linnaehituslik kujunemine* (Tallinn: Valgus, 1993), 158.

41 René Palis, "Pirita tee ja Tallinna lahe kaldakindlustus", *Ehitus ja arhitektuur*, 2 (1979), 12.

42 Ruubel, "1980. a olümpiaehitised Tallinnas", 30.

43 Tallinn City Archives [Tallinna Linnaarhiiv, TLA], TLA.R-301.1.268, 1–11.



FIG. 7. THE EXTENSION OF THE PIRITA ROAD AND CONSTRUCTION OF THE COASTAL FORTIFICATION. C. 1978–1979. PHOTO: AUTHOR UNKNOWN, ESTONIAN MUSEUM OF ARCHITECTURE.



FIG. 8. CONSTRUCTION OF PIRITA ROAD, THE OLYMPIC YACHTING CENTRE IN THE BACKGROUND. THE STREETLIGHTS DESIGNED BY MATTI ÕUNAPUU OF THE CITY DESIGN GROUP ARE ALSO VISIBLE. C. 1979–1980. PHOTO: AUTHOR UNKNOWN, ESTONIAN MUSEUM OF ARCHITECTURE.

Over the years, Olympic construction has placed increasing emphasis on the communication and transport facilities. In Tallinn, the most important of these were the Tallinn TV Tower, the new passenger terminal at Tallinn Airport, the central post office, the automatic telephone exchange in Piritu, the cable trunkline between North and South Estonia, and the radio relay line between Tallinn and Helsinki.<sup>44</sup> Residential buildings are usually erected as Olympic villages within the projects of Olympic urbanism, but in Tallinn, several residential and office buildings were planned for immediate use by local residents. To be more precise, ten apartment buildings were to be built by the summer of 1980, and all these buildings were in Tallinn, flanking important city centre streets, which were to be developed into prominent main thoroughfares. For example, Narva Road was important, because most of the foreign visitors to the regatta would use it to travel to the Piritu Olympic Yachting Centre. The construction of residential and office buildings along significant streets is an example of the staging of the urban landscape, during which the previous wooden buildings were included in demolition plans, and new buildings were constructed. The planned ten residential buildings were built according to custom designs instead of the standard projects that were common at the time.<sup>45</sup>

Before the sailing regatta, new lodgings and overnight accommodations were planned for Tallinn, which were to serve the athletes, tourists, and journalists of the regatta; previously, the city had only 2,000 beds available for foreign visitors.<sup>46</sup> The guidelines for organising accommodation were set by the 'Tallinn-80' plan. Higher-class accommodation was to be offered to honorary and foreign guests and international journalists, for whom the accommodation conditions had to be considerably more exemplary, so as not to expose the Soviet life. They were to be accommodated mainly in hotels, but also in more modern campsites and boarding houses.<sup>47</sup> Domestic tourists from the Soviet Union were to be housed in schools, boarding schools, and dormitories, and there was hope that some of them

44 RA, ERA.R-2002.1.469a.

45 Bruns, *Tallinn – linnaehituslik kujunemine*, 158.

46 Jenifer Parks, *The Olympic Games, the Soviet Sports Bureaucracy, and the Cold War: Red Sport, Red Tape* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017), 110–111.

47 RA, ERA.T-14.4-6.9011, 12.



FIG. 9. THE INTOURIST HOTEL, PLANNED FOR THE OPPOSITE SHORE OF THE PIRITA RIVER. TOOMAS REIN, HARRY SHEIN, 1975. ESTONIAN MUSEUM OF ARCHITECTURE.

would stay with friends or relatives.<sup>48</sup> Should the number of guests have exceeded expectations, the residential buildings completed in the same period during mass construction would have been used, according to the plans. The higher authorities established precise interior design requirements for hotels and dormitories and stipulated that foreigners and locals would be accommodated and catered for separately. The Soviet authorities also determined the code of conduct for the hospitality staff for receiving guests. This was an attempt to ensure that the reality of the social and political life would not reach Western countries as public information.

The most important accommodation unit for the Olympic Regatta was the Hotel Olümpia, an 800-bed hotel in the centre of Tallinn on Liivalaia (formerly Kingissepa) Street. According to the original plan, a hotel accommodating the participants of the Olympic Regatta was to be built on the opposite bank of the Piritu Olympic Yachting Centre<sup>49</sup> (Fig. 9), but city centre was a better choice in the

48 RA, ERA.R-2002.1.592, 18–23.

49 Architects Toomas Rein and Harry Šein.



FIG. 10. VIEW OF HOTEL OLÜMPIA. 1979. PUBLISHED IN *EHITUS JA ARHITEKTUUR*, 2 (1979).

long run.<sup>50</sup> The architecture of the Hotel Olümpia is associated with the influence of Finnish architect Viljo Revell, and the project was designed by experienced architects Toivo Kallas, Rein Kersten, and Ain Andressoo.<sup>51</sup> It was built in 1977–1980, with earlier wooden houses demolished on the site. Finnish builders worked on the site in the final stages of construction, the approval for which was difficult but eventually possible to obtain from Moscow, otherwise the hotel would not have been completed on time (Fig. 10–12).<sup>52</sup> In addition to the Olümpia, there were plans to build an 800-bed hotel next to the main railway station – Baltic Station – at the beginning of Kopli Street. The large hotel was intended for foreign tourists and was to be built in 1976, but the next year brought a realisation that there was no money to build it.<sup>53</sup>

50 RA, ERA.R-2002.1.592, 54.

51 EAM, EAM.38, s 3: Rohkem torne Tallinnale. Veidi Olümpia hotellist. Author: Boris Mirov, manuscript.

52 Personal archive of Krista Kodres: Andres Saar, recorded memories.

53 RA, ERA.R-2002.1.545.



FIG. 11. PERSPECTIVE DRAWING OF HOTEL OLÜMPIA. TOIVO KALLAS, TEIN KERSTEN, 1974. ESTONIAN MUSEUM OF ARCHITECTURE.



FIG. 12. HOTEL OLÜMPIA. C. 1980. PHOTO: AUTHOR UNKNOWN, ESTONIAN MUSEUM OF ARCHITECTURE.



FIG. 13. TALLINN SUPERMARKET ON AIA STREET. EVA HIRVESOO, 1980. ESTONIAN MUSEUM OF ARCHITECTURE.

In the Soviet Union, people were constantly suffering from deprivation of goods. Initially, expectations were high for large numbers of foreign guests to participate in the Olympics, to whom no one wished to show the reality of Soviet life. Therefore, the plans for the Olympic Regatta also included the development of the goods distribution network: constructing many new retail spaces and reconstructing the existing ones. The whole city was covered in plans, but mostly the emphasis was on the Tallinn Old Town. During the Olympic construction, the first-of-its-kind convenience store was opened in Tallinn Old Town on Aia Street in 1979. On completion, it was the largest grocery store in Estonia, with 1,200 m<sup>2</sup> sales space planned for it (Fig. 13). The planning process included Finnish companies, too, which was easier to organise in the circumstances of the accelerated Olympic construction (Fig. 14).<sup>54</sup> The building was criticised during construction as the heritage conservationists did not consider the location of such a new building in Old Town

<sup>54</sup> Triin Ojari, “Olümpiaehitised – Tallinna uus nägu”, *Muinsuskaitse aastaraamat*, ed. by Maris Mändel, Riin Alatalu (Tallinn: Muinsuskaitseamet, 2020), 101.



FIG. 14. TALLINN SUPERMARKET, AXONOMETRIC DRAWINGS OF FINNISH ENGINEERS, 1979. TALLINN URBAN PLANNING DEPARTMENT'S ARCHIVE.

appropriate.<sup>55</sup> The building has been completely reconstructed by today, but it still houses a grocery store. Piritä, the focal point of the Olympic Regatta, was also given a new retail space, where guests and athletes were able to shop, and whose aim was to raise Piritä's image as a respectable living area.

Since the beginning of modern Olympic Games, a cultural programme has been included in parallel with sports, because Pierre de Coubertin believed that the ancient Olympic Games carried the same principle – the Olympic city was meant for athletes, arts and religion.<sup>56</sup> By the time of Moscow Olympics, it had become the norm that in addition to sports buildings, cultural facilities also had to be constructed and renovated, because the cultural events dimension in the programme was very important.<sup>57</sup> It is customary for power

55 Fredi Tomps, "Restaureerimistöödest Tallinna vanalinnas", *Ehitus ja Arhitektuur*, 2 (1979), 41.

56 Wimmer, *Bauten der Olympischen Spiele*, 24.

57 Margaret M. Gold, George Revill, "The Cultural Olympiads: Reviving the Panegrys", *Olympic Cities. City Agendas, Planning and the World's Games, 1896–2016*, ed. by John R. Gold, Margaret M. Gold (London, New York: Routledge, 2011), 94.

to use culture and arts during monumental events, to distract and control the masses.<sup>58</sup> And in Tallinn, very many cultural facilities were on the construction list, most famous of all being the Tallinn Linnahall (Fig. 15–16).

In parallel with the Olympic construction, Tallinn was also going to get buildings whose main functions were the betterment of the locals' health or education. They included kindergartens, schools, sports buildings, and hospitals, which featured in the Olympic construction plan (Fig. 17). Since the Olympic Games are primarily a sports event, the hope was to have the sports facilities and stadiums in the best condition for the Olympic summer. The Olympic Regatta brought sports as a hobby or everyday activity forcefully into the limelight. Within the framework of the Olympic Regatta, there were also talks about building two new hospitals, which had to do with the overall development of the city, but were included in the Olympic construction plan, to make it easier to finance them. They were the Mustamäe Hospital and the Children's Polyclinic on Ravi Street, the latter of which was opened four years after the regatta.<sup>59</sup>

During the preparations for the regatta, for the first time in Estonia, attention was given to urban design, including infographics, small-scale units, and the good, comprehensive and tasteful appearance of the city stock;<sup>60</sup> to implement it, a designers' collective, or the Urban Design Group was established.<sup>61</sup> The work of the collective commenced with a design brief that the designers created for themselves. To that end, in the summer of 1977, they moved around Tallinn, mapping and photographing all squalid areas in need of renewal and design-related intervention. A thick volume was compiled as the design brief, which included zonings, plans and ideas for the beautification and renewal of the whole city. Special attention was given to the main thoroughfares of the city centre, or Liivalaia Street, and Narva and Tartu Roads, on which the guests of the regatta were expected

58 Broudehoux, "Images of Power", 52.

59 ERA.T-14.4-6.36788, 23, 24, 28.

60 Ojari, "Olümpiaehitised – Tallinna uus nägu", 102.

61 The group was led by designer Matti Õunapuu, it included Taimi Soo, Ago Pähn, Silver Vahtre, Tiit Jürna, Jaan Port, Jaak Aavik and Peeter Parker. The group operated on behalf of the city government, but officially belonged with the arts association ARS.



FIG. 15. TALLINN'S LINNAHALL. RAINE KARP, RIINA ALTMÄE, ÜLO SIRP, MARIANN HAKK, 1980. PHOTO: RAINE KARP, ESTONIAN MUSEUM OF ARCHITECTURE.



FIG. 16. THE NEW EDUCATIONAL BUILDING OF THE TALLINN PEDAGOGICAL INSTITUTE ON NARVA ROAD, BUILT DURING THE OLYMPIC CONSTRUCTION. ESTER LIIBERG, 1976–1982. PERSPECTIVE VIEW PUBLISHED IN *EHITUS JA ARHITEKTUUR*, 2 (1979).



FIG. 17. THE DESIGN BRIEF OF THE CITY DESIGN GROUP, 1977. PRIVATE COLLECTION.

to travel (Fig. 18).<sup>62</sup> Spurred by the brief, about 200 projects were conceived for different city design elements, such as benches, lights, waste bins, borders, wooden grates, and much more. In addition to city inventory, designs were made for bus stops, kiosks, supergraphics for empty façades, and for logos and infographics. Ultimately, about 30 design objects and products were made across the city as a result of the Urban Design Group's work, produced at various factories over Estonia. The objects were positioned in the city for the first time for the 1979 Baltic Regatta, which was like a dress rehearsal for the Urban Design Group, as well as for other collectives associated with the Olympics preparations (Fig. 19–21).<sup>63</sup>

The diverse list of objects shows that the Olympic construction in Tallinn was aimed at the reshaping of the entire urban space, not only the building of facilities necessary for organising the events. Considering the volume and speed of the construction, we must stress the special political and administrative order of the construction works. Many projects were given priority statuses, and Olympic projects were given priority in the division of resources. In the context of the Soviet planned economy, it was the only case which allowed to execute ambitious construction plans on a local level. However, not everything planned came to fruition – many

62 Taimi Soo, interview. Conducted by the author, 03.02.2023. Recording in possession of the author.

63 Matti Õunapuu, talk in the series “Millal on disain?” at the Estonian Museum of Applied Art and Design, 09.02.2024. recording in the Estonian Museum of Applied Art and Design.



FIG. 18. MODEL OF CITY DESIGN ELEMENTS. CITY DESIGN GROUP, SECOND HALF OF THE 1970S. PHOTO: MATTI ÕUNAPUU.



FIG. 19. CITY DESIGN ELEMENTS – SEAWEED NET ARCHITECTONICS ON PIRITA ROAD, STREETLIGHTS DESIGNED BY MATTI ÕUNAPUU IN THE BACKGROUND, 1980. PHOTO: GUSTAV GERMAN.



FIG. 20. OLYMPIC CAULDRON. MATTI ÕUNAPUU, 1978–1980. PHOTO: PRIVATE COLLECTION.

buildings remained unconstructed, owing to either lack of time, meagre resources or political decisions.

#### THE IMPACT OF THE BOYCOTT AND UNIMPLEMENTED IDEAS

Even though some of the Olympic construction in Tallinn was ready by the summer of 1980, as planned, many planned objects remained unrealised. Among them, for instance, supplementary sports buildings, cultural and administrative facilities and open-air areas. Partially, their realisation was hindered by either their function being reevaluated, or a lack of sufficient funds, labour, or building materials.

The 1980 Summer Olympics boycott, which was initiated by the president of the United States Jimmy Carter as an opposition to the Soviet troops' invasion of Afghanistan, had an impact on the Tallinn Regatta and its preparations. One of the protest messages was a stance against

the Soviet Union occupation, which the Estonian expats were actively involved in.<sup>64</sup> This is the only time in the history of modern Olympics where parts of the games were held in the territories of occupied states – the sailing regatta in Tallinn and some football matches in Kyiv.<sup>65</sup> Many members of the Government-in-exile of the Republic of Estonia protested by sending letters to the IOC and UN<sup>66</sup> (Fig. 22).<sup>67</sup> As a result of the boycotts, only 81 countries participated in the Moscow Olympics, and 63 stayed away, with 28 of them officially boycotting the OG, 13 countries out of the participating ones were competing under the Olympic flag.<sup>68</sup> The boycott's impact in Tallinn was evident in the fact that even though preparations were made to welcome thousands of foreign guests, they arrived in considerably lower numbers. Also, a large part of the planned accommodation units and infrastructure remained practically unused, which is why the constructed buildings and infrastructure did not reach their potential during the games, and later questions were raised about their expediency.

The important thing about the preparations for the Tallinn Olympic Regatta is that in the context of the Cold War there emerged the need and desire to showcase progress in urban development, including in Olympic construction. The architectural changes in the city and the attempts thereby at activating the economy became a separate factor that formed the foundation for the physical and symbolic reconstruction of the city. Since the new buildings erected for the Olympic Games are usually very large, they carry the potential of becoming significant objects in the urban space, impacting the city's constructional development. Thus, in turn, new investments may be lured into the city, which would bring attention to the city, advance businesses and promote further betterment of the appearance of the city.<sup>69</sup> In the context of the Soviet Union (incl. Tallinn), this meant the

64 The protest of the sailing regatta has been studied and analysed by historian Pauli Heikkilä. See Heikkilä, "Sailing in an Occupied Country", 1472–1490.

65 Andreas Kraas, *Sport ja poliitika: boikottide mõju olümpiamängudele*. Master's thesis (Tartu: Tartu Ülikool, 2014), 49.

66 In her master's thesis, Katariina Sofia Päts studied the Canadian Estonian expats' resistance activities and foreign-policy leanings in the 1980s. See Katariina Sofia Päts, *Kanada eestlaste poliitiline tegevus Eesti iseseisvuse taastamiseks 1984–1991*. Master's thesis (Tartu: Tartu Ülikool, 2023).

67 RA, ERA 4969.1.29.

68 Kraas, *Sport ja poliitika*, 48.

69 Stephen V. Wand, "Promoting the Olympic City", *Olympic Cities. City Agendas, Planning and the World's Games, 1896–2016*, ed. by John R. Gold, Margaret M. Gold (London, New York: Routledge, 2011), 149.



FIG. 21. PROTEST LETTERS TO THE INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE FROM THE GOVERNMENT-IN-EXILE OF THE REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA, 1978. NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF ESTONIA.

creation of a new image; the desire to show the Western countries that the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc are not as backwards as was believed. Nonetheless, despite the iron curtain, the typology of cultural buildings carried similar tendencies in the east and west, which means that different political systems begot similar spatial programmes.<sup>70</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The urban development plan of Tallinn for the 1980 Olympic Regatta was a large-scale and ambitious endeavour, which may be considered an extraordinary and stagey model of urban development in the context of Olympic urbanism. The extent of the urban development plans and the speed of their execution set the Tallinn Olympic Regatta apart from the usual urban development story. The Olympic Regatta gave a forceful push to Tallinn's development, even if many projects remained unrealised or did not become utilised as expected, owing to the international boycott.

Analysing the Tallinn Olympic construction through the typical characteristics of Olympic cities, we may conclude that it was a clearly distinguishable and purposeful urban development, the impact of which has not disappeared, even if the event itself remained internationally modest. This makes the Tallinn Olympic Regatta a remarkable chapter not only in the history of Estonian but also wider Olympic urbanism.

**GRETE TIIGISTE: OLYMPIC URBANISM IN TALLINN: PREPARATIONS FOR THE 1980 OLYMPIC REGATTA**

**KEYWORDS:** OLYMPIC TOURISM; TALLINN OLYMPIC REGATTA; THE 1980 SUMMER OLYMPICS; HISTORY OF CITY PLANNING; ESTONIAN ARCHITECTURE OF THE 1970S

70 Regina Bittner, "Architectures of Cultural Transgression. Cultural Centres Between the Fronts", *Retrotopia: Design for Socialist Spaces*, ed. by Claudia Bentz (Berlin: Kunstmuseum, Verlag Kettler, 2023), 121.

## SUMMARY

As the Sailing Regatta of the 1980 Summer Olympics was going to take place in Tallinn, it was accompanied by a large-scale and ambitious plan for urban development, which shaped the city's constructional image remarkably. This article studies the preparations for the Tallinn Olympic Regatta within the framework of the concept of Olympic urbanism, treating the construction plans linked with the regatta as an autonomous type of city planning. The aim is to analyse how the planned, partially realised and unrealised building projects reflect the construction dynamics and spectacle characteristic of the Olympic cities. The article is based on the author's master's thesis, *Tallinn Under Full Sail. Olympic Urban Change Shaping The City*, at the University of Tartu in 2024.<sup>71</sup> The article does not concentrate on the architectural analysis of single objects, but on the building programme as a whole – its political background, planning process, and impact.

## CV

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71 Grete Tiigiste, *Tallinn täispruges. Linna muutev olümpiaehitus*. Master's thesis (Tartu: Tartu Ülikool, 2024).

