LIFE AFTER MEGA-EVENTS:
STRATEGICALLY REUSING LEGACY PARKS

by
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B.S. in Urban and Regional Studies
Cornell University

Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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at the
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June 2017

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Department of Urban Studies and Planning
May 24th, 2017

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Associate Professor Brent D. Ryan
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Thesis Supervisor

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Associate Professor P. Christopher Zegras
Chair, MCP Committee
Department of Urban Studies and Planning
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Abstract

A great deal of research has scrutinized the mixed legacy of staging “mega-events” such as World’s Fairs (or Expos) and Olympic Games. Host cities regularly invest billions of dollars building the facilities and supporting infrastructure needed to accommodate millions of visitors over a fixed period of time. In doing so, they also consume hundreds of acres of land, including large masses of urban space in which core activities are clustered. An analysis of urban mega-events over the past century and a half indicates that numerous host locations have converted core event grounds into large urban parks. This thesis investigates the post-event reuse of urban parks built on these fairgrounds.

Through investigative research, interviews, and onsite fieldwork of selected post-event “legacy” parks, prevailing issue areas concerning their viability and accessibility are identified. Drawing on the experiences of Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, a large park built on the former grounds of two World’s Fairs in New York City, this thesis suggests strategic public space reuse and management approaches for Flushing Meadows and other legacy parks confronting similar challenges. The idea that post-event parks must be preserved as democratic and accessible civic spaces is stressed, particularly in light of increased privatization of the urban public realm.

Thesis Supervisor: Brent D. Ryan
Title: Associate Professor of Urban Studies and Planning
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I am indebted to my interview subjects and other professionals in New York, Los Angeles, and Brazil who greatly reinforced my thesis research. In particular, my experiences at ITS-Rio and Office of Exposition Park Management helped form a great deal of my thinking. This research could also not have been possible without the generous support of the SA+P Harold Horowitz (1951) Student Research Fund, the PKG Public Service Center, and the MISTI/MIT-Brazil Program.

Most importantly, I want to thank my family and friends for being a constant source of inspiration, motivation and love. To my DUSP family: I can’t think of any better group to have shared this experience with. Thank you for making MIT an unforgettable moment. To my parents and grandparents, thank you for being my heroes and for teaching me the most important life lessons. And to Tyler, thank you for being my partner and best friend through it all, and for pushing me to strive for greatness. Los amo.
Motivation

For many city dwellers, their local park is a valuable civic space that offers a break from the busy chaos and built environment that persists throughout the city. For me, Flushing Meadows-Corona Park in my hometown of Queens provided that and much more. It was not only the place where I learned to walk and bike, but also the place where I learned about urban planning, Robert Moses, mega-events, and the unprecedented redevelopment of New York City in the mid-20th century. Indeed, Flushing Meadows today is more than just another city park. A remnant of two massive World's Fairs, it is a hodgepodge of green spaces, cultural institutions, sports facilities, and decaying relics of the fairs. It is also the largest and most visited park in Queens, and thus the flagship public open space of the most ethnically diverse urban county in the nation (Narula, 2014).

This storied past has created an uncertain future for my local park. As a large open space housing a jumble of public and private activities, questions linger about the city's ability to maintain and fund it properly. The pressures of privatization are a constant concern for the park, which remains a hotbed for development proposals ranging from new stadiums to shopping malls.

An emergent question is how the park will respond to the rise of large festivals organized in cities. As major urban centers worldwide grow in population, organizers of music festivals and other paid-admission events are seeking large urban spaces on which to stage their events. Permitting festivals on public spaces has become a profitable opportunity for municipalities struggling to finance their parks, but it has also raised apprehension about the loss of free and open access to public spaces.

Such is the present case at my local park. In recent years, several attempts have been made to answer some of the most pressing questions confronting Flushing Meadows. The Flushing Meadows-Corona Park Alliance was established in 2015 as a public-private partnership to support the upkeep and enhancement of the park. That same year, the Design Trust for Public Space collaborated with the NYC Parks Department to develop the Community...
Design School, an initiative to generate proposals from local residents on improving the park’s access and connectivity with neighboring communities.

Still, the challenges facing the park’s uses and maintenance are persistent. There is a palpable identity crisis concerning the park’s multifaceted function—a local park for the diverse surrounding communities; an anchor destination serving the broader city; and a regional hub of sports, educational, and cultural venues.

Every time I return home, I make it a point to walk through the sprawling grounds of Flushing Meadows. Each time, I come across something new, be it a freshly paved path, a new recreation center, or another stadium. These changes are inevitable, sometimes necessary or welcome. But if the park is to succeed as one of the city’s crown public open space jewels, a more methodical and inclusive approach to its effective maintenance and programming must be developed.
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1. Introduction

The 1964/65 New York World’s Fair, staged on the present site of Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, remains the most attended international festival in US history (Young, 2017). More than 50 million people purchased tickets to the fair, traveling deep into Queens to reach the 646-acre campus. Years earlier, Robert Moses had overseen the site’s conversion from a vast trash dump famously characterized as a “valley of ashes” in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby, into the fairgrounds of the 1939/40 New York World’s Fair. For two six-month periods over 1964 and 1965, eighty nations and dozens of companies set up pavilions and exhibits which collectively formed a memorable display of mid-twentieth century technology, culture and consumerism.

Fifty years after the fair, Flushing Meadows-Corona Park (“FMCP”) stands as one of the largest and busiest parks in New York City. In addition to hundreds of acres of open and green space, the park is home to numerous publicly-supported cultural, educational and recreational institutions. Several of these establishments are housed in structures originally built for the fairs, including the New York Hall of Science, Queens Museum, and Queens Theatre. Unlike most other public parks in the city, FMCP also contains major facilities that host private activities, most notably Citi Field (home stadium of Major League Baseball’s New York Mets) and the National Tennis Center (home of the annual US Open Grand Slam tennis tournament). Further, the park hosts a variety of permitted events each year, including the Hong Kong Dragon Boat Festival and Maker Faire New York.

Despite all of this, in 2016 the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation voted to reject all permit requests to stage major festivals in Flushing Meadows, citing a lack of an official policy on paid-admission events organized by for-profit entities (Matua, 2016). This rather ironic decision provides the basis for the following thesis, which calls attention to “legacy parks” established over the grounds of previous mega-events. In particular, I investigate the post-event reuse approach and public space philosophy employed by select legacy parks, with the aim of identifying effective management and programming guidelines for Flushing Meadows-Corona Park.
Research Questions

The main objective of this thesis is to analyze the reuse and management mechanisms employed by municipalities to support the upkeep and vitality of public open spaces developed on former mega-event sites, in order to suggest effective reuse guidelines for Flushing Meadows-Corona Park. Many of the claims concerning the potential benefits of staging large-scale events in urban settings underscore their legacy of broad infrastructural and economic development, but often neglected is their prevailing tendency to induce unique parks that are rarely ever purely public or wholly private domains. Engaging the contemporary dimensions and understandings of mega-event legacy and urban public space management, this thesis aims to answer three questions:

a) What shared reuse and management challenges and opportunities are apparent in post-event urban parks today?

b) How do different municipalities respond to these challenges and opportunities?

c) What lessons can be learned and utilized at Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, particularly concerning private uses and partnerships, to promote its upkeep and use as a dynamic and accessible civic space?

Thesis

The successful conversion of mega-event sites into urban public spaces is a central determinant of an event’s overall legacy. To achieve a successful conversion, host city leaders and event organizers must work to develop strategic reuse plans and a management and operations structure that ensures sustained upkeep, programming and dynamism of the space. However, many host cities have struggled to achieve this feat, as in the case of Flushing Meadows-Corona Park. Engaging private sector support in the programming or management of post-event parks is thus predictable. However, if the successful conversion from fairground to urban public space is to be achieved, cities must foster the preservation of these sites as permanently accessible and democratic places that boost the city’s cultural life, open space, and green space supply.
Methods

For this thesis, I focus on two mega-event types in particular, International Expositions (or World’s Fairs) and Summer Olympic Games. Historically, these event types have most consistently led to the creation of post-event urban parks in host cities. This is due to their shared propensity to consolidate a multiplicity of event activities into centralized nodes that can be cordoned-off, secured, and connected with transit options.

In addition, I highlight four sub-case examples of post-event urban parks that are in existence today. Rather than discuss mega-events from around the world, I restrict these sub-case studies to cities in the United States that have hosted a World’s Fair or Summer Olympics in the past century. The unique political and economic climate of a nation tends to have a significant impact on the delivery and legacy of mega-events, as was most recently evidenced in the case of the 2016 Rio Olympics in Brazil. These sub-case studies are intended to inform recommendations that I offer concerning my central case study, Flushing Meadows-Corona Park. The decision to underscore the emerging questions concerning paid-admission urban festivals has allowed me to focus on a contemporary issue that illustrates the long-standing management and operations challenges that FMCP faces.

The majority of research for this thesis was conducted over a yearlong period between January 2016 and January 2017 (See Table 1). This included multiple trips to Flushing Meadows-Corona Park in New York City, to gain a solid understanding of the various institutions, public and private actors, initiatives and policies influencing the present functions and future disposition of the park.

An equally important facet of the research process was to identify other similar public spaces that have emerged on the grounds of mega-event sites, and assess their existing conditions and management structure. As such, I made exploratory site visits to a number of cities throughout the Americas that have hosted World’s Fairs or Olympic Games in the past century. These locations were Mexico City, Montreal, Rio de Janeiro, and Los Angeles. At each site, I conducted participant observation and interviews with management representatives of post-event parks, as well as community stakeholders. I spent the summer of 2016 in Rio de Janeiro, during which I focused my research on the city’s preparation process for hosting the
first Olympic Games in South America; the institutional frameworks and tensions present among event organizers, government, businesses and community organizations; and the legacy planning discourse concerning the post-event reuse and management of mega-event sites.

Table 1. Research Visits to Mega-Event Sites, 2016-17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Dates Visited</th>
<th>Sites Visited</th>
<th>Events Hosted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New York City, USA</td>
<td>01/04/16 - 01/05/16</td>
<td>Flushing Meadows-Corona Park</td>
<td>1939/40 World’s Fair;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>03/11/16 - 03/11/16</td>
<td></td>
<td>1964/65 World’s Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>06/12/16 - 06/20/16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>01/04/17 - 01/08/17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico City, Mexico</td>
<td>01/17/16 - 01/23/16</td>
<td>Ciudad Universitaria, Alberca Olimpica F. Márquez</td>
<td>1968 Olympic Games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montreal, Canada</td>
<td>10/07/16 - 10/10/16</td>
<td>Parc Jean-Drapeau; Olympic Park</td>
<td>1967 World’s Fair;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1976 Olympic Games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio de Janeiro, Brazil</td>
<td>07/05/16 - 08/27/16</td>
<td>Barra Olympic Park, Deodoro Olympic Park, Olympic Boulevard</td>
<td>2016 Olympic Games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles, USA</td>
<td>01/21/17 - 01/28/17</td>
<td>Exposition Park</td>
<td>1932 Olympic Games; 1984 Olympic Games</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with key informants during the 2016 and 2017 research trips, or otherwise by phone when necessary. Careful attention was given to selecting informants who possessed the knowledge or experience necessary to answer all or part of the research questions outlined above. Interviews lasted between thirty minutes and one hour, or up to two hours when combined with in-person site visits.

In New York, I conducted interviews with Flushing Meadows-Corona Park administrators, FMCP Alliance members, Queens Museum staff, and Community Design School members. In Mexico City, I met with management staff of the Alberca Olímpica Francisco Márquez and completed a tour of the facilities and their present-day functions. Similarly, in Montreal I met staff of the Olympic Park and conducted a site tour, visiting several sites throughout the campus. In Rio, interviews with municipal officials, Olympic Organizing Committee actors, mega-event researchers, community organizers, and Rio 2016 partner organizations like Microsoft and Airbnb were particularly helpful. In Los Angeles, I spent one week as a resident researcher at the Office of Exposition Park Management ("OEPM"),
conducting interviews with park management and operations staff, as well as other institutions in the park and partners such as the LA84 Foundation.

Figure 1. Images from Mega-Event Host Cities Visited

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New York City</th>
<th>Mexico City</th>
<th>Montreal</th>
<th>Rio de Janeiro</th>
<th>Los Angeles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Source: Author, 2016-17

Structure of Thesis

This thesis begins with a review of existing literature on ‘mega-event’ planning and the expected legacies for host cities. The next section researches the contemporary drift towards private sector management of public spaces and its implications. Chapter 3 explores host cities of the last century and a half, indicating that upon the conclusion of mega-events, central grounds are often converted into parks and other public spaces intended for civic and cultural life. Indeed, dozens of civic spaces across the US and internationally are found to have been established on the former grounds of mega-events.

Chapter 4 contends that the afterlife of mega-event sites share a unique set of spatial, reuse, and management challenges and opportunities, given their initial design and purpose as exclusive spaces that were cordoned off from the rest of the city for large temporary festivals. Common issue areas concerning the subsistence of post-event sites are identified, including funding and maintenance, design and connectivity, purpose and identity, and programming and activities.

In exploring workable solutions to the challenges identified, Chapter 5 highlights the case of Flushing Meadows-Corona Park. FMCP was inaugurated in 1967 as the largest city park in Queens after serving as the fairgrounds for the 1939/40 and 1964/65 World’s Fairs. Chapter 6 considers the key forces influencing the park’s future, including the relentless commercial appropriation of public land in New York City, and the increased reliance on public-private
partnerships to maintain city parks. Chapter 7 analyzes the case of Flushing Meadows within the context of existing discourse on mega-event legacy and public space management, and of the four sub-case studies reviewed. Interventions are suggested to facilitate a more effective reuse and management strategy at Flushing Meadows, focusing on opportunities available through the FMCP Alliance and the rise of paid-admission festivals staged in public urban spaces as revenue-generating ventures. In conclusion, this thesis advocates the notion that private-sector involvement in city parks must ensure their preservation as permanently open and accessible public spaces.
2. Legacy of Mega-Events

Since the turn of the century, the unprecedented investments, risks and impacts associated with “megaprojects” have led to increased interest in their planning and management among researchers (Altshuler & Luberoff, 2003; Davis & Flores Dewey, 2013; Fainstein, 2008; Flyvbjerg, 2009, 2014; Gellert & Lynch, 2003; Kennedy et al., 2011). Megaprojects are large-scale and often complex capital investments in such areas as infrastructure for basic services, economic development through real estate and commercial projects, transport infrastructure, and urban redevelopment.

Megaprojects are often established on the rationale that they generate collective benefits, including broadened and improved access to mobility, energy, and technology. In addition, as cities increasingly become spaces for consumption amid a global economy in which services catalyze expansion, megaprojects are exploited as a means of optimizing desired economic, social, and/or environmental outcomes. In essence, they have become a key driver of urban and regional development at an international level (Rose & Spiegel, 2009).

Within the urban environment, typical megaprojects include public bridges, buildings, tunnels, highways, airports, waterfront redevelopment, and ephemeral large-scale events. These include internationally recognized “mega-events” like the Olympic Games, FIFA World Cups, and World’s Fairs, as well as “smaller” major occasions like festivals, conferences and conventions that may be more confined in their geographic extent or audience reach. Some examples in the United States include the National Football League’s annual Super Bowl and the Democratic and Republican National Conventions.

The City as Stage

Since the mid-nineteenth century, cities and nations around the globe have eagerly sought to stage large-scale ephemeral events that attract hundreds of thousands of visitors and have worldwide reach. The 1851 Great Exhibition staged on 26 acres of London’s Hyde Park was the first in a continuing sequence of World’s Fairs to brand cities as host sites of
international exhibitions of culture, industry and technology. The 1896 Summer Olympics staged in Athens soon followed as the first international Olympic Games, and largest sporting event, held in modern history.

Figure 2. The First Modern Mega-Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Great Exhibition, London (1851)</th>
<th>First Modern Olympic Games, Athens (1896)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

These international occasions, better known as “mega-events”, often come with significant costs and lasting impacts on the built environment and the population of the host locations. While the most notable mega-events are now sporting tournaments such as the Summer and Winter Olympics and the FIFA World Cup, prominent World’s Fairs (or Expos) continue to take place intermittently in major cities, including the 2010 Shanghai Expo which attracted a record 73 million visitors to its fairgrounds over its six-month duration. Meanwhile, regional tournaments like the Pan American Games and single-sport events such as the Super Bowl are also considered mega-events, though of a lesser scale.

In particular, mega-events represent a distinctive type of megaproject, as they equip host locations with an unparalleled platform to carry out a collection of megaprojects within a prescribed region and timeframe. For many cities, mega-events symbolize an opportunity to advance their long-term urban and economic development goals. Host locations routinely make significant investments in the construction or upgrading of venue, transport, and other infrastructure in preparation for these occasions. What were once international fairs and sports
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Nation</th>
<th>Fairgrounds</th>
<th>Area (Acres)</th>
<th>Current Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Kensington Exhibition Road</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Shared Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Jackson Park</td>
<td>717</td>
<td>Public Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>Brussels</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>(2) Cinquantenaire Park; Tervuren Park</td>
<td>89;</td>
<td>Public Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>St. Louis</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>(2) Forest Park; Washington University</td>
<td>1,260</td>
<td>Public Park; University Campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>Brussels</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>(3) Solbosch Plateau; Cinquantenaire Park; Tervuren Park</td>
<td>222; 89; 511</td>
<td>University Campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>Ghent</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>Cinquantenaire Park; Tervuren Park</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>Public Park</td>
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<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Marina District</td>
<td>628</td>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
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<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>Rio de Janeiro</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>Castelo</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>City District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>Barcelona</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>(2) Monjuï¿½; Plaça d’Espanya</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>City District; Public Plaza</td>
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<td>1935</td>
<td>Brussels</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>Heysel Plateau</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>Public Park; Exhibition Center</td>
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<td>1937</td>
<td>Paris</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>Jardins du Trocadéro</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>Public Garden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>Helsinki</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Malmi Airterminal</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>International Airport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>Liège</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>Parc Astrid</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>Public Park</td>
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<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Flushing Meadows-Corona Park</td>
<td>1,216</td>
<td>Public Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>Port-au-Prince</td>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>Gonave Bay Waterfront</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Public Square; Neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Brussels</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>Heysel Plateau</td>
<td>494</td>
<td>Public Park; Exhibition Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Seattle Center</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>Public Civic Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Flushing Meadows-Corona Park</td>
<td>646</td>
<td>Public Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Montreal</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Parc Jean Drapeau</td>
<td>902</td>
<td>Public Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
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1 The following Fairs/Expos are omitted as they occurred on existing fairgrounds or parks and did not create new legacy spaces: London (1851), New York (1853), Paris (1855, 1867, 1878, 1889, 1900), Vienna (1873), Philadelphia (1876), Melbourne (1880), Barcelona (1888), Liège (1905), Milan (1906), Chicago (1933), Stockholm (1936), Tsukuba (1985), and Hanover (2000).
<table>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Nation</th>
<th>Olympic Park</th>
<th>Area (Acres)</th>
<th>Built for Event</th>
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<tr>
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<td>UK</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>1968</td>
<td>Mexico City</td>
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<td>227</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Munich</td>
<td>Germany</td>
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<td>Moscow</td>
<td>Soviet Union</td>
<td>Luzhniki Olympic Complex</td>
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<td>Athens Olympic Park Sports Complex</td>
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<td>China</td>
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<td>1,767</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
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<td>UK</td>
<td>Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>2016</td>
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<td>Brazil</td>
<td>(2) Barra; Deodoro Olympic Parks</td>
<td>297; 121</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Sports &amp; Entertainment Complex, Closed</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2 The 1940 Olympics planned in Helsinki, Finland and 1944 Olympics planned in London, UK are omitted as they were cancelled because of World War II.
tournaments have become major city events: occasions for large-scale urban transformation (Essex & Chalkley, 1998; Gold & Gold, 2008; Kassens-Noor, 2013; Roche, 2002).

As such, planning for mega-events often appropriates public and private resources, consumes hundreds of acres’ worth of city land, and reshapes urban and regional development plans. Further, central event campuses, known as Expo fairgrounds or Olympic Parks, take up large plots of urban land and serve to gather, delimit, and secure a collection of event facilities and the large masses of people that patronize them over a fixed period of time.

**Potential Legacy Benefits**

Such hallmark events are typically measured and evaluated with reference to their impact, be it economic, social, and/or environmental. They are frequently perceived as having the potential to create substantial enduring impacts on the growth and development of the host destinations (Hall, 1994). The concept of “legacy” has been used with increasing frequency in the existing literature on social and long-term impact of sports events. The popularity of the word legacy is largely due to its association with widespread Olympic discourse referring to the long-lasting impacts of hosting Olympic Games. Despite the lack of a clear definition, the concept of ‘legacy’ has become an essential part of mega-event literature (Girginov & Hills, 2008) as more authors tend to agree that event legacies could be positive or negative, tangible or intangible, intended or unintended (Chappelet, 2012; Gratton & Preuss, 2008; Mangan & Dyreson, 2010), and authors have proposed different perspectives on event legacies.

As Müller notes, substantial disagreement exists concerning the nature of mega-event impacts (2015). These occasions are often seen as beneficial to the urban development of cities and nations bidding to host them. Event-governing bodies like the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) uphold this view, as do major consulting firms and other promoters that publish studies tending to highlight positive effects of mega-events (Ernst & Young, 2015; Pellegrino & Hancock, 2010; PwC, 2010). Some scholars claim that mega-events are catalysts for urban development, enabling hosts to “accelerate infrastructural development by up to ten years” (Preuss, 2004).
and serving “as powerful catalysts to accelerate their urban and transport plans” (Kassens-Noor, 2013).

Preuss asserts that that every Summer Olympics since 1972 has made some operational surplus which organizers can spend to benefit both national and international sport, associating major losses with long-term capital and structure investments made by host cities. “It is impossible and even wrong to state the overall effect of different Olympics with a single surplus or deficit. The true outcome is measured in the infrastructural, social, political, ecological and sporting impacts a city and country receive from the Games” (2004).

Some studies further indicate that mega-events can produce economic benefits for host cities and nations, particularly due to increased investment, tourism and business activity (Clark, 2008; Payne, 2006). Other scholars suggest that cities and countries can leverage mega-events to improve their image and brand internationally and empower community action (Barrios, Russell, & Andrews, 2016; Chalip, 2006). Evans (2014) notes that Expos in particular provide a unique opportunity to showcase and celebrate a city’s creative credentials and distinctiveness. He notes that arts and cultural organizations are instrumental in the post-event legacy phase, where access to and management of facilities and their re-use can benefit from cultural use. “The legacy of mega-events is therefore key, as memories of the actual event year quickly fade–however, the more inclusive and ‘cultural’ the event, the greater the long term positive effect is likely to be, and this will also influence the attitude towards future mega-events and regeneration projects.”

Increased attention to planning for the enduring legacy of mega-events has boosted the view that these occasions can positively influence urban development (Gratton & Preuss, 2008; Kindel, Watkins, & Hasdal, 2009). Kasimati (2003) summarizes the potential long-term benefits to a city of hosting the summer Olympics. The purported long-term benefits of hosting large-scale events include (a) increasing tourism through national and international exposure, (b) attracting new businesses and employment, (c) enabling critical infrastructural improvements, and (d) raising perception of the host site so that it becomes established as a “world class” city capable and robust enough to handle high-profile enterprises (Matheson, 2006).
Conflicting Legacy Claims

While these claims may have some truth, empirical research only gives mixed support to these propositions of long-term benefits. Many possible downsides to hosting such events have been raised. For one, Flyvbjerg asserts that megaprojects as a general policy are “disasters waiting to happen,” given their underestimated costs, overestimated benefits and revenues, undervalued environmental impacts, overvalued economic effects (Flyvbjerg, 2009), as well as legal and ethical issues (Flyvbjerg, Bruzelius, & Rothengatter, 2003). With regards to mega-events, little empirical evidence has conclusively demonstrated long-term “improvements in economic growth or living standards” as a result of hosting such one-time spectacles. It is highly unlikely, for instance, that a single event can sustain its intended benefits for a period well beyond the event and have a long-term impact by itself (Ritchie & Smith, 1991).

Adverse outcomes of mega-events surface in nearly every host location and often receive a great deal of media attention. As Müller points out, “cost overruns, schedule slips, oversized infrastructure, and social polarization dash the high expectations for positive urban development resulting from such events” (2015). Flyvbjerg and Stewart note that since 1960, without exception, the Olympic Games have gone over budget, on average by 179 percent (2012). In 2004, for instance, the Summer Games in Athens were estimated to cost US$16 billion, or more than three percent of the Greek gross domestic product at the time. The event created a legacy of white elephants and environmental damage, and is credited with triggering Greece’s fiscal decline (Malkoutzis, 2012). The 2012 Olympics in London, which were considered to be better organized than previous Games, nonetheless exceeded its initial bid estimate by up to $15 billion (Zimbalist, 2015). In Rio de Janeiro, the combined preparations for the 2007 Pan American Games, the 2014 FIFA World Cup, and the 2016 Summer Olympics resulted in the eviction or resettlement of over 75,000 mostly low-income residents, further intensifying social and spatial division throughout the city (World Cup and Olympics Popular Committee of RJ, 2015).

In sum, ex-post studies of mega-events planned in the last half-century indicate that they have persistently faced similar challenges of high risks, uncertainty, inadequate citizen
participation, the pressure of ruling elites, lack of transparency, weak public support, and social and environmental impacts (Owen, 2005). Moreover, there is minimal guarantee that events that have been successfully hosted in one city will have the same positive impacts and benefits if hosted in another location. Local conditions vary and, thus, so does the ability to achieve desired positive outcomes.

Yet, despite the ominous prospects of mega-events and unfavorable legacies left behind at many previous host locations, cities and nations continue to express interest in staging these spectacles, though to an evidently declining extent. Both the Summer and Winter Olympics have seen fewer cities submit bids in recent years, likely due to the soaring costs and requirements associated with planning them (Abend, 2014). Nonetheless, there is continued interest—particularly among cities in emerging economies of the global South—in utilizing such occasions as an instrument for urban development and the promotion of social, economic, and/or environmental aims (Baade & Matheson, 2015; Busa, 2012).
3. Privatization of Public Space

Value of Public Space

The free use of open space may offend us, endanger us, or even threaten the seat of power. Yet that freedom is one of our essential values. We prize the right to speak and act as we wish. When others act more freely, we learn about them, and thus about ourselves. The pleasure of an urban space freely used is the spectacle of those peculiar ways, and the chance of interesting encounter. (Lynch & Carr, 1979, p. 415)

Legacy parks are the byproduct of private occasions. They are explicitly designed to be cordoned-off and secured, with access limited to event participants and ticketed spectators. These sites, regardless of their post-event designation as urban parks or other publicly accessible spaces, are thus inherently challenged by their private and exclusive nature. This condition is manifested in host cities’ recurrent reliance on public-private partnerships to support the repurposing and management of legacy parks. Therefore, in addition to considering the various perspectives on the legacy of mega-events, addressing the persistent challenges of post-event parks also necessitates an understanding of the growing discourse on private sector involvement in the sustenance of publicly accessible urban spaces. We must consider the prevalence of private interests in public space, and how public spaces are governed and administered, regardless of their formal status as publicly owned places.

While there are many definitions of what constitutes public open space, this thesis identifies the term (along with its variation “publicly accessible space”) as a label for all publicly and privately owned parks, plazas and other civic spaces that can be used freely by all people. This description is in line with Carmona’s broad definition of public space, which encompasses “all the streets, squares and other rights of way, whether predominantly in residential, commercial or community/civic uses; the open spaces and parks, and the ‘public/private’ spaces where public access is unrestricted (at least during daylight hours).”

Urban public spaces are considered an essential component of successful cities. Since the nineteenth century, urban planners, reformers and officials have asserted that publicly
accessible spaces serve critical social and political ends, facilitating economic development, community revitalization, and social capital (Schmidt, 2008). The Project for Public Space (2012) and others argue that these spaces promote a relationship with nature as they offer a place for rest from the chaos of urban life. Further, publicly accessible spaces are attributed with fostering democracy and the harmonious interaction of diverse populations (Habermas, 1984; Miller, 2007).

Rise of Private Sector Involvement

Schmidt and Németh (2011) call attention to the widely accepted view that publicly accessible spaces are critical for creating safe, viable, and sustainable urban environments. The authors note that this “lofty but somewhat vague” perception remains mostly unchallenged, enjoying universal support and appropriated by many planning approaches, from New Urbanism to economic development. Yet, in recent years, the private sector has increasingly assumed the role of providing publicly accessible spaces. With the population of major urban centers on the rise, many municipal governments continue to face resource strains as demand for services increase. This has enabled a growing list of city parks departments to grant the delivery and management of publicly accessible space to private organizations. As Mitchell and Staeheli (2006) put it, cities are employing the creation of “pseudo-private properties“ that are formally owned by government bodies, but accountable to private control and regulation.

Across the US, conservancies (also known as “alliances”) and business improvement districts (“BIDs”) have emerged as two of the most prevalent entities formed to manage public spaces. Conservancies primarily raise private funds to support improvements and maintenance of public parks through agreements with local governments. Some conservancies also take on a prominent in the management and programming of public spaces. BIDs, meanwhile, are financed largely through taxes on property and business owners who collectively contribute to the maintenance, development and promotion of their commercial district. Both conservancies and BIDs are generally established as private nonprofit organizations.
Nationwide, private organizations manage a growing number of city parks, plazas, squares, streets, marketplaces, and other public realm elements. New York City in particular has long employed and advanced the use of private management to sustain hundreds of its city parks. Proponents of the model frequently cite the Central Park Conservancy, the Prospect Park Alliance, and more recently the Friends of the High Line as successful examples of private nonprofit entities that handle day-to-day operations, invest in critical capital projects, and provide the majority of operating funds (Gilroy, Kenny, & Morris, 2013; Harnik & Martin, 2015). In all, conservancies currently participate in managing more than half of New York’s 1,700 public parks. New York also has 72 BIDs, more than any other city, serving nearly 39,000 tax lots across the five boroughs (Benson, 2017).

The Case for Private Management

The concept of privately-managed, publicly-owned spaces has continually evoked both acclaim and criticism since its proliferation over the last thirty years (Kayden, 2000; Reiss, 1993). This model of public-private partnerships has been hailed by government officials and private stakeholders as a valuable tool to help revitalize urban parks, downtowns and even entire neighborhoods while curbing costs to the public. Private management can ensure that parks remain open to the public, are managed according to the long-term vision of elected and appointed officials, and remain financially sustainable (Gilroy et al., 2013).

In their analysis of community gardens, Staeheli et al. (2002) suggest that active participation between public, private and nonprofit sectors is beneficial for the vitality of public space. Privatizing what is often considered public rights to land, they claim, can help transform these spaces into sites where different ‘publics’ can enjoy their right to the city and register that right in the landscape. Banerjee (2001) agrees that these forms of collaborations are favorable, given that all parties involved have an interest in public space.

Some economists assert that the private sector can provide virtually all forms of public goods. Richardson and Gordon (1993) advise planners to plan with the market and not without or against it. Pointing out the private services that already supplement public security, sanitation and correctional services, they note, “The issue becomes the relative efficiency of
private and public provision, rather than the nature of the good (private or public)." Beito et al (2002) claim that we too often associate planning of the built environment only with a government-led top-down activity. Instead, they regard privatized social services by nonprofit firms generally as an improvement over the traditional forms of government.

Given these perceived benefits, Murray (2008) argues for the refinement of contemporary nonprofit organization theories to incorporate the ways in which private groups take responsibility for public spaces. By taking physical control of public spaces as single entities and assuming their funding, Murray contends that nonprofits and other private entities centralize accountability and responsibility in ways that reduce the cost of monitoring their performance and enable them to make use of "residual demand for the public good of public spaces." Increased responsibility differentiates private entities from governmental organizations, according to Murray, since private managers are more accountable for their actions and more responsible to donors who value improved operations.

**Democracy in Public Space**

However, this trend of "privatization" has also provoked skepticism from scholars, community groups and others concerned with the chronic loss of urban public space and its implications for cities and urban dwellers. Many scholars argue that cities without dynamic and accessible public spaces do not engender collective action, since they constrain citizens' capacity for interaction, debate, and activism (Ghorra-Gobin, 2001; Low & Smith, 2006; Mitchell, 2003). In *Brave New Neighborhoods*, Kohn (2004) emphasizes the loss of the public sphere resulting from increasing commodification and privatization of public space. She argues that privatization of public space restricts democracy, political activity, and freedom of speech, while its rejection of certain activities and people cultivates segregation and further erodes democratic rights and processes. While democracy and free speech can transpire in places that are not public, then, the absence of public space would make this form of social interaction particularly challenging.

Apostol and Banerjee (2006) agree that the provision of public space is occurring under a present social environment of segregation and insularity of social groups. Toolis (2017)
similarly perceives the privatization trend as a “social problem that contributes to the entrenchment of social, economic, and racial inequality.” Drawing on a range of psychology concepts, she proposes a "critical placemaking" framework to reclaim public space for universal use, theorizing its potential to transform community narratives and promote more inclusive, participatory, and democratic communities.

Schaller and Modan (2005) emphasize the tendency of private management to promote consumption in the public realm and exclude traditionally marginalized low-income residents and small businesses who cannot contribute adequately under this model. BIDs and similar organizations, they claim, represent the greater transformation of public space from “an open, free-use space to one where people perform the duties of the ‘good citizen’.” Referencing Goss’ (1996) statement that pseudo-public spaces can facilitate a range of “sociability” and invite those who may be excluded from public spaces through fear of violence, Mitchell and Staeheli argue that such spaces are possible precisely because the site is private and its managers can exclude those assumed to be dangerous or undesirable (2006).

The role of public space in promoting freedom of speech is often considered one of its valued functions (Mitchell, 2003). Public space offers a place for “extraordinary events” that facilitate political activism, civic participation, and other multidimensional forms of free speech (Irazábal, 2008). Yet, while the “rights to free speech and assembly are indispensable in a functioning democracy,” privatized public spaces and other public-private partnerships are often states of exception (ACLU of Michigan, 2015).

**Limits of the Present Discourse on Privatized Public Space**

At the same time, a number of scholars highlight the limitations of the conventional “public versus private” dichotomy present in the urban open space discourse. Kohn argues that contemporary dialogue on the use and nature of public space does not adequately capture the complexity and variety of places that comprise our shared live experience (2004). “We need to engage in more careful reflection on the reasons why we should protect free speech and public space,” she advises, asserting that theorists most concerned with
democracy focus on the value of speech rather than the importance of space, and thus fail to offer compelling rationales that challenge the privatization of public space.

Carmona et al (2008) similarly contend that too often, academic discourse has seen public space in black and white terms, whereas public space management is in practice far more complex and nuanced. They seek to address the issue of what public space users actually want, “as opposed to what academics, public space managers, politicians, or other interested parties think is good for them.” Apostol and Banjeree also highlight the need for a compelling case for “pure” public spaces, those not influenced by private interests, made on greater understanding of the actual uses of these places.

Barber (1998) makes the argument that most public space users actually appreciate free speech in the abstract, but often avoid it in reality. Privately-managed public spaces, including shopping malls and theme parks, offer a cleaner, risk-free version of public life “where no homeless person, panhandler, or zealot can disturb the illusion of a harmonious world” (Kohn, 2001). In sum, these perspectives raise important questions on the traditional discourse on public space, as the creation and sustenance of convivial public life in public spaces entails more complexity than public versus private control.

Going further, Apostol and Banjeree also emphasize the importance of the physicality and ongoing process of design in the vitality of public space. The works of Whyte, Kayden and Loukaitou-Sideris all serve to highlight the political economy of urban design in the production of public space. The authors suggest that public space design is influenced by a variety of forces, including politics, institutional structures, negotiations with developers, development guidelines, professional constraints, legal agreements and means of enforcement, individuals’ preferences, and the challenge of aggregating individual choices into collective decisions. Design is also central to placemaking, a community-focused, bottom-up approach that engages local people in the creation and management of dynamic public spaces. However, placemaking is often more successful when applied in smaller-scale public spaces, and less apt to address the challenges of larger city parks or public spaces with an undefined range of uses and users (Project for Public Spaces, 2001, 2012).
4. **Review of Legacy Parks**

This chapter presents four public spaces in the United States that have been built on the grounds of Olympics Games and World’s Fairs over the past half century. These locations are:

1. Exposition Park, the core of the 1932 and 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles;
2. Seattle Center, host of the 1962 World’s Fair in Seattle;
3. HemisFair Park, host of the 1968 World’s Fair in San Antonio; and
4. Centennial Olympic Park, the central legacy of the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta.

An overview of each legacy park is offered, highlighting their post-event ownership, use, and management trajectories, as well as their general present conditions. Whereas Seattle Center and HemisFair Park are city-owned properties, for instance, Exposition Park and Centennial Olympic Park are state-owned parklands.

This case study review further indicates that similar trends exist concerning the evolution of legacy parks, with many relying on the use of public-private partnerships to sustain their public-facing operations and programming. Still, it is also evident that each site has taken on a variation of the private support model. The City of Seattle, for example, retains management control of the Seattle Center campus, while San Antonio has delegated management of HemisFair Park to a private nonprofit that is overseeing the site’s redevelopment into a mixed-use district. Each location thus provides an account of post-event reuse and management that may offer guidance and best practices to Flushing Meadows-Corona Park and other legacy public spaces confronting similar post-event challenges.
Exposition Park

Figure 3. Entrance to Expo Park, LA
Source: Los Angeles, 2008

Figure 4. Aerial View of Expo Park
Source: Google, 2017
Table 4. Summary of Exposition Park

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Host City</th>
<th>Los Angeles, California, USA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mega-Event</td>
<td>1932 Summer Olympics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start Date</td>
<td>July 30, 1932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End Date</td>
<td>August 14, 1932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nations Participating</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Cost</td>
<td>$1 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tickets Sold</td>
<td>1.2 million</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legacy Space</th>
<th>Exposition Park</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current Designation</td>
<td>Public Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area Size</td>
<td>160 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ownership</td>
<td>State of California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Office of Exposition Park Management (Department of CNRA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Actor(s)</td>
<td>Expo Park Master Plan Community Advisory Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding Source(s)</td>
<td>Onsite revenue operations (self-sustaining)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key attractions</td>
<td>California Science Center, Natural History Museum of LA County, Exposition Park Rose Garden, Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, California African American Museum, LA84 Foundation/John C. Argue Swim Stadium, Bank of California Stadium (under construction), Lucas Museum of Narrative Art (to be constructed)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: (LAOOC, 1985; OCOG-LA 1932, 1933; OEPM, 2016)

Exposition Park is a 160-acre tract of land in South Los Angeles primarily owned by the State of California, with portions owned or leased by the City of Los Angeles and the County of Los Angeles. Originally a privately-owned racetrack and fairgrounds, the site was jointly purchased in 1889 by the state, county and city to become a public educational, cultural and recreational center. Under this tripartite ownership and operational structure, the state funded an exposition building (present-day California Science Center), the county funded a museum and art gallery (present-day National History Museum), and the city pledged to maintain the park grounds and establish a garden (present-day Rose Garden).

The site notably served as the central focus of the 1932 and 1984 Summer Olympic Games staged in Los Angeles. For the ’84 Olympics, event organizers provided nearly $2 million of permanent park improvements, established a community relations office serving the
south-central LA neighborhood, and developed a regional transportation master plan for the area surrounding Expo Park (LAOOC, 1985).

Expo Park is located directly across from the University of Southern California (USC) campus in the Exposition Park neighborhood just south of Downtown Los Angeles. The area is served by the Metro Expo Line light-rail line, which runs between the park and USC campus. More than 31,000 people reside in the neighborhood, over 90 percent of which are Black or Latino. It has among the highest densities and lowest median household incomes in the city and county (LA Times, 2010).

Figure 5. Exposition Park in 1984 and 2017

The park is managed by the California Natural Resources Agency, a state government agency responsible for several historical, natural and cultural sites. The Office of Exposition Management (OEPM), a sub-department of the state agency, oversees general park operations, maintenance, parking services, special events, ground leases, and communication between all park entities. Approximately one fifth of the park’s surface is presently dedicated to parking lots operated by OEPM and occasionally rented out for major and special events such as the annual Air + Style and FYF festivals. As such, OEPM is 100 percent self-funded.
through revenue generated primarily from onsite parking, leases, and major special events held within the park (State of California, 2016).

The function and management of Expo Park have continually evolved since its opening to the public in 1913. In addition to the original attractions, a range of venues and land uses have emerged throughout the park, frequently through the use of public-private partnerships. Most notably, the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum was completed in 1923 and would become the main Olympic Stadium for the 1932 and 1984 Summer Games in Los Angeles. The stadium was built on state land with city and county funds raised by a nonprofit corporation created by the City Council and the Board of Supervisors. The three governments established a Joint Powers Agreement known as the Coliseum Commission in 1945 to operate the Coliseum and adjacent Memorial Sports Arena (LAMCC, 2017).

In 2013, the Commission transferred all financial responsibility for the management, operation and renovation of both venues to the University of Southern California (USC) in a 98-year master lease agreement. The stadium is currently home to the USC Trojans football team, as well as the temporary home of the National Football League’s Los Angeles Rams until their permanent relocation in 2019 to a new stadium in eight miles away in Inglewood (LAMCC, 2014).

This news was closely followed by the announcement of a partnership between USC and Major League Soccer’s Los Angeles Football Club (LAFC) to demolish the Memorial Sports Arena and redevelop the site into a sports and entertainment complex. The project, which broke ground in 2016, includes a 22,000-seat soccer stadium and over 100,000 square feet of new restaurants, office space, a conference center, and a soccer museum in the park. The $350 million complex is slated to open in 2018 as “Banc of California Stadium” after a 15-year, $100 million naming rights deal between the bank and LAFC (Banc of California, 2016).

Yet another recent project announced at Exposition Park is the Museum of Narrative Art housing George Lucas’ personal art collection and items from his ‘Star Wars’ franchise. Set to open in 2021, the billion-dollar project is expected to be entirely privately-financed by the filmmaker. The museum will be constructed near the Coliseum on parkland now covered by parking lots, and will include its own privately-managed underground parking (Vankin, 2017).
Seattle Center

Figure 6. International Fountain and Space Needle
Source: DSA, 2015

Figure 7. Aerial View of Seattle Center
Source: Google, 2017
### Table 5. Summary of Seattle Center

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Host City</th>
<th>Seattle, Washington, USA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mega-Event</strong></td>
<td>Seattle World’s Fair/Century 21 Exposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Start Date</strong></td>
<td>April 21, 1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>End Date</strong></td>
<td>October 21, 1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nations Participating</strong></td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Cost</strong></td>
<td>$69 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tickets Sold</strong></td>
<td>9.6 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legacy Space</strong></td>
<td>Seattle Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current Designation</strong></td>
<td>City Department; Civic Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Area Size</strong></td>
<td>74.1 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ownership</strong></td>
<td>City of Seattle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Management</strong></td>
<td>Seattle Center (Department of the City of Seattle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Actors(s)</strong></td>
<td>– Seattle Center Advisory Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Seattle Center Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Funding Source(s)</strong></td>
<td>– City of Seattle General Fund (public funding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Onsite revenue operations (commercial funding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Seattle Center Foundation (private funding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Attractions</strong></td>
<td>– Space Needle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– International Fountain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Seattle Center Monorail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Center House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Museum of Pop Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Fisher Pavilion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Pacific Science Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Key Arena</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Mercer Arena (under renovations)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources:** Seattle Center, 2011; Stein, 2000

Seattle Center is a civic center owned and operated by the City of Seattle. The 74-acre urban campus was first established in 1962 to host the Seattle World’s Fair/Century 21 Exposition. Twenty-four nations participated in the fair, while nearly 10 million people visited the fairgrounds between April and October 1962. The $69 million fair is among the few modern expos considered a financial success, as organizers were able to pay off private investors three months into the fair. The fair was also much smaller in scale and budget than the billion-dollar New York World’s Fair that would succeed it in 1964 (Seattle Met, 2012).

The 1962 exposition was also successful in creating a positive legacy for the built environment and long-term development of downtown Seattle. Upon the fair’s conclusion, the
city took ownership of most of the remaining facilities and campus grounds to create what is now the Seattle Center Department in 1963. The Seattle Space Needle, built as the visual centerpiece of the fair, was popular among fairgoers then and has since become the city’s most iconic destination. Other attractions originally built for the fair that also remain in use include the present-day Alweg Monorail, KeyArena sports venue, Cornish Playhouse performing arts center, and Pacific Science Center.

Figure 8. Seattle Center in 1962 and 2017

1962 World’s Fair Map

Current Campus Map

Source: Seattle Center, 2016

Today, the Science Center Department is slightly larger than the original fairgrounds, and includes 17 acres of green and open space, and more than 30 cultural, education, and entertainment entities. Additionally, in 2016 it hosted over 16,000 events and programs and welcomed 2.2 million people, maintaining its spot as the top tourist destination in Washington State (Puget Sound Business Journal, 2017).
The campus is managed by a director appointed by the Mayor of Seattle, and a team of city employees. As a City department, Seattle Center is supported in part by tax dollars from the city's General Fund. It generates additional revenue from onsite commercial operations and corporate sponsorship for public programs. Major sources of commercial revenues include charges to private clients for facility rentals, parking fees, long-term leases to nonprofit organizations, sponsorships, and monorail fares. In addition, it provides the spaces and services for a variety of commercial events, both for profit and not for profit, sponsored and produced by private and community promoters.

Because of its substantial reliance on commercial revenues, Seattle Center faces many of the same financial woes and influences confronting other businesses, including consumer preferences, fluctuating demand, and competition for customer discretionary spending. The Department is further challenged by a surge in competing facilities, financial challenges of long-term nonprofit tenants, and balancing the mix of public and private uses on the campus (City of Seattle, 2011).

Further, the Department also receives funding collected by the Seattle Center Foundation. The Foundation was independently established in 1977 as a nonprofit public benefit corporation to encourage support and raise awareness for Seattle Center. It serves as the center's portal for financial donations, volunteer service and corporate support. The Foundation engages a range of individual contributors, philanthropic grants, and grassroots fundraising campaigns that are increasingly vital to sustaining the campus, particularly in light of recent reductions for all City General Fund functions (Seattle Center, 2008).
HemisFair Park

Figure 9. Entrance to HemisFair Park  
Source: TexTraveler, 2016

Figure 10. Aerial View of HemisFair Park  
Source: Google, 2017
Table 6. Summary of HemisFair Park

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Host City</strong></th>
<th>San Antonio, Texas, USA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mega-Event</strong></td>
<td>San Antonio World’s Fair / HemisFair ’68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Start Date</strong></td>
<td>April 6, 1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>End Date</strong></td>
<td>October 6, 1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nations Participating</strong></td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Cost</strong></td>
<td>$156 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tickets Sold</strong></td>
<td>6.4 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legacy Space</strong></td>
<td>HemisFair Park / Hemisfair District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current Designation</strong></td>
<td>City District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Area Size</strong></td>
<td>96 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ownership</strong></td>
<td>- City of San Antonio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Federal Government-General Services Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- University of Texas-San Antonio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Management</strong></td>
<td>Hemisfair Park Area Redevelopment Corporation (HIPARC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Actor(s)</strong></td>
<td>- Hemisfair Conservancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Hemisfair Coalition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Funding source(s)</strong></td>
<td>- City of San Antonio (public)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Hemisfair Conservancy (private)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Onsite revenue operations (commercial funding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Attractions</strong></td>
<td>- Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- University of Texas-San Antonio Institute of Texan Cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- John H. Wood, Jr. Federal Courthouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The Magik Theatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Instituto Cultural de México</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Tower of the Americas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sources: BIE, 2016; HPARC, 2012*

HemisFair Park is a district in the southeastern edge of Downtown San Antonio, Texas, and the former fairgrounds of the 1968 World’s Fair known as HemisFair ’68. Prior to the fair, the 96-acre site was a dense residential and commercial neighborhood, and home to a diverse working class population. In the early 1960s, the US Housing and Home Finance Agency acquired the site primarily through eminent domain after declaring it blighted and in need of redevelopment. Federal urban renewal program funds were used to clear the site and relocate families. The land was then purchased by the City of San Antonio and subsequently leased to San Antonio Fair, Inc., the state-chartered nonprofit group appointed to organize HemisFair ’68.
The $156-million fair project was financed through a combination of private donors, city bonds, federal urban renewal funds, and state and federal appropriations. Over thirty nations and 15 companies participated in the mega-event, and around 6.4 million people visited the fair during its six-month duration. This attendance was well below the expected 7.2 million visitors needed to ensure a success, however, and the fair ended with a $7.5 million deficit (BIE, 2016).

**Figure 11. HemisFair Park in 1968 and 2017**

Despite the financial loss and underwhelming audience, HemisFair ’68 is credited with helping to attract renewed commercial and tourism interest to the Downtown area (San Antonio Fair, n.d.). The San Antonio River Walk, which was significantly extended for the fair, is now a major tourist destination and central to the city’s commercial and cultural activities. Meanwhile, legacy structures from the fair include the present-day University of Texas-San Antonio Institute of Texan Cultures (originally the Texas Pavilion), the San Antonio Federal...
Courthouse (originally the Texas Pavilion), the city-owned Henry B. González Convention Center, and the Tower of the Americas, which has become the chief city landmark and skyline staple. Further, the HemisFair Arena was home to the NBA’s San Antonio Spurs for twenty years before its demolition in 1995.

Today, the City of San Antonio owns about fifty of the site’s 96 acres, thirty of which are occupied by the expanded Convention Center. Approximately 15 acres were redeveloped into a large open space and rededicated as HemisFair Park in 1988, twenty years after the fair (Medina, 2017). The park had seen minimal development and moderate usage since then. In 2009, the San Antonio City Council established the Hemisfair Park Redevelopment Corporation (HPARC), a nonprofit local government corporation tasked with transforming and managing the park and surrounding areas into an “urban district with multiple parks, residences, and local businesses” (HPARC, 2016).

In 2015, HPARC legally changed HemisFair Park’s name to “Hemisfair” in an effort to communicate the broader impact of the fairground’s renewal into an urban parks district. As part of its multi-year redevelopment plan, HPARC is constructing a series of three urban parks totaling 19 acres of parkland, as well as 17 acres of residential and commercial development through public-private partnerships with real estate developers. The first park, Yanaguana Garden, opened in 2015 and quickly became the city’s second-most visited park by acre. The first two major public-private development deals moved forward in 2017, launching the construction of new residential rental units, office space, shops, restaurants, and a hotel around the three parks. Hemisfair property will continue to be city-owned, while buildings will be leased in order to pay for the maintenance and operation of the public parks (HPARC, 2012).

With public-private partnerships generating revenue, the Hemisfair parks are projected to be financially self-sustaining by 2021, while remaining free and open to the public. At present, HPARC relies on operational funding from the City of San Antonio, revenues from operations, and private donations. Though the city provided bonds funds for initial park construction and street improvements, there is insufficient public funding for the future public improvements, park maintenance, and HPARC’s operation and management of the parks.
These will be funded by leases generated from mixed use development, in addition to grants, private donations, market and historic tax credits, incentives, tax increment finance, bond investments and Parks & Recreation budgets and other financing sources. As a result, HPARC established the Hemisfair Conservancy in 2014 to raise philanthropic dollars for capital construction, operations, historic preservation, maintenance and park programming. The Conservancy has operated as an independent charitable organization since 2015, and is expected to be key in ensuring the eventual financial self-sustainability of the parks at Hemisfair (HPARC, 2016).
Centennial Olympic Park

Figure 12. Fountain of Rings
Source: Sanchez, 2016

Figure 13. Aerial View of Centennial Olympic Park
Source: Google, 2017
Table 7. Summary of Centennial Olympic Park

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Host City</th>
<th>Atlanta, Georgia, USA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mega-Event</td>
<td>1996 Summer Olympic Games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start Date</td>
<td>July 19, 1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End Date</td>
<td>August 4, 1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nations Participating</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Cost</td>
<td>$4.1 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tickets Sold</td>
<td>8.8 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legacy Space</td>
<td>Centennial Olympic Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Designation</td>
<td>Public Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area Size</td>
<td>21 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ownership</td>
<td>State of Georgia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Georgia World Congress Center Authority (State of GA entity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Actors</td>
<td>Centennial Park District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding source(s)</td>
<td>Onsite revenue operations (commercial funding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Georgia World Congress Center (public funding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fountain of Rings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Southern Company Amphitheater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Georgia World Congress Center (GWCC) (adjacent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Georgia Aquarium (adjacent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children’s Museum of Atlanta (adjacent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CNN Center (adjacent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>World of Coca-Cola (adjacent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SkyView Atlanta Ferris Wheel (adjacent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mercedes-Benz Stadium (adjacent, under construction)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Centennial Olympic Park is an urban park in downtown Atlanta, Georgia created for the 1996 “Centennial” Olympics. At 21 acres, it is the largest American downtown park to be developed in the last quarter century. The site was conceived three years before the Games to serve two purposes – first as a public gathering spot during the Olympics, and subsequently as a legacy park to anchor residential and commercial redevelopment efforts in Georgia’s capital city.

The $75 million project was entirely financed by the private sector, with funds raised by the City Chamber of Commerce and local philanthropic foundation grants, as well as the sale

---

3 The Atlanta Olympics were known as the Centennial Games because they were held one hundred years after the first modern Olympic Games took place in 1896 in Athens, Greece, 1,500 years after the ancient tradition was banned by Roman Emperor Theodosius I.
of commemorative engraved bricks. Nearly 500,000 bricks were sold with support from The Home Depot, becoming the most successful brick buying program in US history (GWCCA, 2016b).

Due to strong private support, the State of Georgia agreed to develop and permanently maintain the park in 1994. The Georgia World Congress Center Authority (GWCCA), a public corporation and economic development instrumentality of the State, oversaw development of the park and continues to operate it on the state’s behalf today (State of Georgia, 2016).

**Figure 14. Centennial Olympic Park in 1996 and 2017**

During the 1996 Games, the park and all of its events were open to the public and free of charge. About 5.5 million people visited the park throughout the three-week event, more visitors than all other cluster venues combined. The park was closed for three days halfway through the Games, after a pipe bomb explosion caused two deaths and 110 injuries. The bombing reflected the heightened threat of terrorism during mega-events, and contributed to
the much more complex and costly security operations now frequently staged for major international events (Boyle & Haggerty, 2009).

The park presently forms part of the GWCCA’s 220-acre downtown campus, which also includes the 3.9 million square foot Georgia World Congress Convention Center (GWCC) and the new $1.5 billion Mercedes-Benz Stadium for the NFL’s Atlanta Falcons. The park welcomes three million visitors each year, and while not self-sustaining, generates about $2 million of its $3.5 million annual operating budget through revenue from onsite space rental, sponsorships, and food and beverage sales. The convention center contributes much of the remaining need (State of Georgia, 2016).

Centennial Olympic Park is generally regarded as a positive economic legacy for Atlanta. The green space is credited with revitalizing a deteriorated part of downtown, attracting new museums, events, and over $2 billion in commercial and real estate investment to the area since 1996, with another $725 million either under construction or in the pipeline. In 2007, neighborhood businesses and attractions established a joint nonprofit group to promote the park and its surrounding area as a downtown entertainment district. In 2016, they transferred management to the larger Central Atlanta Progress (CAP), a downtown development group, and rebranded the marketing campaign to Centennial Olympic District. CAP has since expanded outreach efforts and drawn several new headlining events and partners to the park (GWCCA, 2016a).

In 2016, the GWCCA initiated a two-year $17 million makeover of Centennial Olympic Park soon after its twentieth anniversary. Renovations include new gateways to improve connectivity with the community, an expanded amphitheater for larger events, and new features to highlight the park’s Olympic heritage (GWCCA, 2017).
5. Flushing Meadows-Corona Park

The aftermath of a World’s Fair is at least as significant as the Fair itself. Visitors to such an exposition carry away indelible impressions, lively lessons, enduring satisfactions and pleasant memories, but what finally remains on the ground when the pageant has faded, the brickbats have been removed by the wreckers and scavengers, and the park planners have gone to work, is of more concern to the next generation than any spectacle, however gorgeous.

–Robert Moses, Thirty Years of Progress, 1964

Figure 15. Aerial View of FMCP

Source: Google, 2017
Figure 16. View of FMCP from the No. 7 Subway

Table 8. Summary of Flushing Meadows-Corona Park

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Host City</th>
<th>New York City, New York</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mega-Event</td>
<td>1939/40 World’s Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start Date</td>
<td>April 30, 1939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End Date</td>
<td>October 31, 1940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nations Participating</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Cost</td>
<td>USD 155 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tickets Sold</td>
<td>45 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legacy Space</td>
<td>Flushing Meadows-Corona Park (FMCP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Designation</td>
<td>Public Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area Size</td>
<td>898 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ownership</td>
<td>City of New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>NYC Department of Parks and Recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Actor(s)</td>
<td>- FMCP Alliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- FMCP Conservancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding Source(s)</td>
<td>- NYC Department of Parks and Recreation (public funding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- FMCP Alliance (private funding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key attractions</td>
<td>- The Unisphere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- New York State Pavilion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- New York Hall of Science</td>
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Sources: NYC Parks, 1964; Weglein, Scheir, Peterson, Malsbury, & Schwartz, 2008
Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, or “FMCP” for short, is an 898-acre urban park located in the northwestern section of the borough of Queens, and the geographic center of New York City. Currently owned and operated by the City of New York, FMCP is the largest public park in Queens and fourth largest in the city. It is one of the most visited parks in New York, and is home to various cultural, sports and educational institutions that serve the broader region.

The park is perhaps best known for having hosted the two largest mega-events in New York City history, the 1939/40 and 1964/65 World’s Fairs. These international expositions significantly shaped the unique spatial and functional composition that characterize the park and its environs today. FMCP’s foundation as the fairgrounds of ephemeral events has further contributed to growing concerns regarding its long-term management, functions, accessibility, and preservation. The following sections thus attempt to encapsulate the complex history of the park, its present challenges, and strategic considerations for its future success.

**Before the Fairs**

Flushing Meadows-Corona Park sits on what was originally the Flushing Creek and a biodiverse tidal salt marsh which served as a natural filtration system for the area’s waterways. Much of the site was bounded by the growing communities of Flushing and Corona, whose farmers and nursery owners depended on the rich marshland habitat nearby. The landscape would begin to change at the start of the twentieth century, when the City of New York deepened Flushing Creek to create a port and sold off large tracts of marshlands to private owners.

The new proprietors maintained contracts with the Brooklyn Ash Company to convert 350 acres of the meadows into a large dumping ground. Through a contract with the city, the ash company deposited one thousand cubic yards of burned trash and debris into the marsh each day. The Corona Dump continued to grow for nearly three decades, with one ash heap labeled “Mount Corona” reaching a height of ninety feet. A vivid description of the Corona Dump was etched into literature when F. Scott Fitzgerald described it in *The Great Gatsby* as
“a valley of ashes—a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens.”

**From Ashes to Fair**

FMCP was first conceived by Parks Commissioner Robert Moses as early as 1930. The park was at the center of his ambitious vision to build an expansive network of expressways and large parks throughout the greater New York area. With his sights set on Queens, Moses sought to transform the blighted Corona Dump into a large recreational haven.

At over twelve hundred acres, it was to be Moses’ grandest park scheme and would require significant backing from the public and private sectors. The City of New York began acquiring portions of the dumping grounds from the Brooklyn Ash Company in 1934, and secured state and federal funds to initiate a massive reclamation scheme to transform the marshlands and dump into an ordered landscape (NYC Parks, 2007).

Once discussions surfaced about staging a world’s fair in the city, Moses saw an opportunity to finance his plan for new parklands and highways. He supported the selection of the site as grounds for the 1939/40 New York World’s Fair, intending to use the revenue from the mega-event to build what he called the true “Central Park” for all city residents (Caro, 1974).

Under the guidance of business and civic leaders, a nonprofit corporation was formed in 1935 to organize the mega-event using federal, state, municipal and private funds. Construction of the fairgrounds began in 1936 when the city formally leased the Flushing site to the World’s Fair Corporation. To make way for the Fair, the city also forced the eviction of a working-class, mostly Italian community that had emerged on the eastern edge of the dump. This removal of over one hundred families is often-overlooked in the history of FMCP and its two world’s fairs.

Moses appointed prominent landscape architect Gilmore D. Clarke to design the fairgrounds that was to subsequently become a grand park in the style of a French formal garden. Clarke designed a geometric Beaux-Arts plan for the northern section—the core of the fairgrounds—composed of several major and minor boulevards and paths radiating out from a central point with major axes ending at focal points containing pavilions, fountains and sculptures.
Salt marshes along the southern section of the grounds were excavated to form Meadow and Willow Lakes, which today are still the largest in New York City. The lakes provided topsoil to cover the heaps of ash and, true to Moses' vision for a network of expressways, were entirely enclosed by new arterial parkways constructed to improve traffic flow for the Fair.

**The First World’s Fair**

The first New York World’s Fair opened in April 1939 under the central theme of “Building the World of Tomorrow.” It surpassed previous international fairs by almost every measure. At $155 million, it was the most expensive fair to date. The 1,216-acre site was larger than all but the Louisiana Exposition fairgrounds established in St. Louis thirty years prior. Over sixty foreign nations, thirty U.S. states and territories, and one thousand exhibitors participated in at least one of the Fair’s two six-month seasons. Hundreds of pavilions and attractions, ranging in size from a few square feet to several acres, were constructed along the wide boulevards of the fairgrounds.

*Figure 17. Aerial View of the 1939/40 World’s Fair*  
Source: NYPL, 1939
The 1939/40 New York World’s Fair became the best attended international exposition up to that point, welcoming 45 million paid attendees during its two seasons (Weglein et al., 2008). This record attendance, however, was not enough to cover the Fair’s steep expenses. The event grossed only $48 million, leading the Fair Corporation to declare bankruptcy.

Given the Fair’s financial failure, Moses was unable to secure the funds needed to develop his grand park. Instead, construction began on a scaled-down version of “Flushing Meadow Park” the day after the fair closed in April 1940. Clarke’s original Beaux-Arts plan was kept mostly intact, resulting in a partially-landscaped site with wide promenades and a hodgepodge of attractions. While most pavilions were demolished as planned, some structures were intended to remain after the Fair. Permanent holdovers include the New York City Building, the New York State Exhibit, the Boathouse on Meadow Lake, and five pedestrian bridges connecting sections of the park divided by expressways and waterways.

Over the next two decades, disjointed improvements to the park would take the place of a large-scale redevelopment plan. Moses’ grand vision for Flushing Meadows was precluded by a lack of funding, fading political support due to the Fair’s failure, and the onset of World War II. For most of the war, the US Army occupied a large portion of the park’s northern section.

**Figure 18. Flushing Meadow Park**

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<th>Original Post-Fair Park Plan</th>
<th>Actual Post-Fair Park</th>
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*Source: Clarke, 1936*  
*Source: NYC Parks, 1951*
Despite its incomplete condition and poor maintenance, Flushing Meadows Park continued to attract visitors during this time. People from around the city frequented the assortment of open green spaces and amenities spread throughout the vast landscape. In 1946, the New York City Building became the temporary headquarters of the newly formed United Nations General Assembly. Among the notable decisions made during this time were the creation of UNICEF and the state of Israel. The UN eventually moved to its permanent location in Manhattan in 1950.

The Second World's Fair

In 1959, Moses again chose Flushing Meadows Park as the site of a second New York World's Fair. This time, he oversaw construction of the fairgrounds as president of the Fair Corporation, remarking that “The future promises a beautiful, modern park in the very geographical and population center of the City.” Moses again appointed Clarke as lead designer of the fairgrounds, whose new plan included a series of pools and fountains added onto the original radial layout.

The 1964/65 World's Fair was to be primarily an exhibition of emerging technology, from space exploration to computers. The theme, “Man's Achievements on a Shrinking Globe in an Expanding Universe,” was symbolized by a thirteen-story stainless steel representation of the Earth called the “Unisphere,” which also served as the focal point of the fairgrounds. The Unisphere still stands today as the world's largest globe and has become the iconic symbol of Queens.

After five years in development and much controversy over its rising costs, the fair finally opened in April 1964. The fair was nearly derailed early on as its failure to receive official sanction from the Bureau of International Expositions (BIE) led many key European nations to opt out of participating. Nonetheless, eighty countries—mostly smaller and developing

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4 The 1964/65 Fair conflicted with three BIE policies. First, a nation can only host one international expo within a decade. Seattle had hosted an expo two years prior after the BIE selected it over New York to host the 1962 World’s Fair. The Fair Corporation nonetheless continued with its plans for its own, unsanctioned fair. Second, the BIE
nations—were represented in 37 pavilions, while American corporations picked up much of the slack. The large pavilions from major manufacturing companies such as General Electric, Ford and IBM led the fair to become above all a showcase of twentieth century consumerism and technology.

With a total capital investment of over one billion dollars in public and private funds, the 1964/65 Fair was by far the costliest and first billion-dollar international exposition to have been staged until that point. A record seventy million paid attendees would be needed in order to generate enough revenue to cover both the event debt and creation of a permanent park. In the end, 51 million people visited the fair during its two six-month seasons. Although requires that fairs last no more than six months. The Fair Corporation, seeking to maximize profits to cover the event's exorbitant costs, chose to schedule two six-month seasons instead. Third, the BIE restricts organizers from charging rental fees to exhibitors. In another effort to increase profits, the Fair Corporation opted to collect rents from all exhibitors.
this attendance was among the highest of any international fair, it fell short of expectations. The fair's modest revenue was barely enough to cover its debt, and much less than the anticipated $50 million was left for the conversion of the fairgrounds into a municipal park.

In the years following the fair, Moses was able to muster enough funds from a range of public and private sources to restore the site, albeit not to the grand park he initially envisioned. After leasing it for seven years, the Fair Corporation returned the site to the City of New York on June 3rd, 1967 as the new “Flushing Meadows-Corona Park.” The restored park now included attractions, open spaces, and recreational amenities left behind by both fairs. Permanent holdovers from the 64/65 Fair included including the Unisphere, the New York State Pavilion and adjacent Theaterama (present-day Queens Theatre), the New York Hall of Science, and numerous works of art scattered throughout the park. More importantly, the residents of a rapidly expanding New York City gained a new publicly accessible open space that was larger than any other park built in the city in nearly 80 years.

**FMCP Today**

It has been fifty years since the dedication of Flushing Meadows-Corona Park as one of the largest municipal public spaces in New York City. During this time, the form and function of the park have continued to evolve, often inspiring debate about its future use and direction. FMCP has become, at once, a vital neighborhood park for local residents, a regional destination for non-local visitors, a site of historic value and international import, a campus of public and private entities, a green haven amid a densely built environment, and a hotbed for development prospects. This assortment of identities and uses is not unexpected, but rather a gradual outcome stemming from the park’s history of instability and uncertainty.

Flushing Meadows today is as much a progeny of the two NY World’s Fairs as it is a product of unrealized grand visions. It is an incredibly popular public space, in large part due to the range of entertainment and recreational attractions, many of which were legacies of the fairs. The amount of open space allows for a variety of concurrent uses, from soccer matches to birthday parties to public festivals.
Yet the largeness of the park’s features—from its wide paths to the imposing towers of the New York State Pavilion—also serve as reminders of a fairgrounds that was built to accommodate half a million people at once. They hint at a fairgrounds that was never fully rescaled for the more modest purpose of a municipal park. Inferior maintenance and deteriorating relics throughout the park further allude to the chronic lack of resources that has imperiled the survival of the park since its very beginning in the 1930s.

Indeed, fifty years later, the struggle persists to adequately maintain the sprawling landscape of Flushing Meadows-Corona Park and preserve its historical significance. Uncertainty hovers over the park’s future uses and development plans, its ecological rehabilitation, and its long-term management. Further, increasing attention is being drawn to the park’s accessibility and relationship with its diverse neighboring communities, which range from the majority low-income and Hispanic neighborhood of Corona, to the more affluent and Jewish population of Forest Hills. The following sections provide an overview of FMCP’s present features and an account of its challenging existing conditions.

**Park Description**

At nearly 900 acres, Flushing Meadows-Corona Park is in reality a series of city-owned parklands starting at the Flushing Bay and stretching nearly four miles north-south through the heart of Queens. The park can be divided into three general sections. The northern portion, which sits on the central site of the two World’s Fairs, includes the “core” of the park. The core is approximately a mile wide, and contains a majority of the park’s most notable attractions, including the Queens Museum, Hall of Science, Queens Theatre, and Queens Zoo. This section also houses the FMCP Pool and Rink Center and the Al Oerter Recreation Center, the busiest aquatic and recreation centers operated by the NYC Parks Department. Access to this section of FMCP is possible by subway via the No. 7 line, by bus along several routes, by commuter rail on the Long Island Rail Road, by boat via the World’s Fair Marina, and by plane at the nearby LaGuardia Airport. In recent years, the city has also gradually created and improved a bicycle network surrounding the FMCP core.
The Unisphere is the focal point of the core, where all of the major radial boulevards meet. Several other installations from the 1964/65 Fair are scattered throughout this site, most notably the decaying observation towers and “Tent of Tomorrow” that comprise the New York State Pavilion. Also in this section are the Flushing Meadows Golf Center and National Tennis Center. Along with the Citi Field stadium and parking lots located north of the core, these facilities sit on park property that are on long-term lease to private entities. Together these private concessions occupy over 120 acres, or thirteen percent of Flushing Meadows-Corona Park.

In addition to the core and Citi Field complex, the northern section of FMCP also includes the Flushing Bay Promenade, a 1.4-mile long narrow strip built between the bay and Grand Central Parkway. It stretches from LaGuardia Airport to Willets Point, and houses the World’s Fair Marina, a public marina with over 250 slips, a boat launch, and a ferry landing.

The southern two thirds of FMCP are dominated by Meadow and Willow Lakes, the two man-made water bodies built over the Flushing Creek and marshlands. The Meadow Lake portion is bordered by the Long Island Expressway (LIE) to the north, the Grand Central Parkway to the west, the Van Wyck Expressway to the east, and 69th Road and Jewel Avenue to the south. These large freeways completely enclose Meadow Lake and its environs. The Meadow Lake Bridge connects this section with the northern core, crossing over twelve lanes of the LIE. The bridge is connected to the Meadow Lake Trail, which encircles the entirety of Meadow Lake. Measuring 100 acres and ¾ of a mile in length, the lake is the largest in New York City.

This portion is characterized by the bushes, weeds, grassy landscapes, and minimal built structures that surround Meadow Lake. The network of freeways form a barrier around the area, restricting access to neighboring communities to a few pedestrian overpasses. Still, the parklands are heavily used by local residents who frequent its trail, baseball fields, cricket fields, playgrounds, formal barbeque areas, and rent boats from the Meadow Lake Boathouse. Large parking lots are available at both sides of the like, indicating the limited public transit available, and the higher rate of car ownership in the more affluent residential communities surrounding this section of the park.
South of Meadow Lake is Willow Lake, the third and final section of FMCP. At 48 acres, it is the second-largest lake and one of the few remaining protected freshwater wetlands in New York City. The lake and its surrounding habitat were designed as a natural refuge in the park’s initial plans, and remained one throughout the two World’s Fairs. Today it is home to a variety of willow trees, migratory bird habitats, and native wildlife. Until recently, the 55 acres of parkland around Willow Lake had been closed to the public for nearly twenty years. The site had become largely neglected, and in 2008 was devastated by a large brush fire. After a major restoration project, the Willow Lake Trail is presently managed as a minimal public access nature preserve (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 2017).

Key Features
The following list is a selection of main features and attractions found throughout Flushing Meadows-Corona Park. These elements are among the most popular and often frequented by local and non-local visitors. Together, they characterize the complex functions and identity—or identities—of the expansive park.

1. *Unisphere*

   The Unisphere is a large stainless steel sphere commissioned to serve as the symbol and focal point of the 1964/65 World’s Fair. The globe sits atop a 1.7-acre circular reflecting pool that contains 96 fountainheads surrounding the sphere. The Unisphere is the largest globe in the world, one of the most notable legacies of the Fair, and the primary icon of Queens. Although access into the pool is unwelcome by park staff, the centrally-located site is frequently used by visitors for a range of unplanned functions. Local families use the base as a recreational pool to cool off in the summer months when it is filled with water, denoting the lack of free public pools in the surrounding neighborhoods. When the pool is dry, children use the site as a safe place to run around and bike. In recent years, skateboarders had been increasingly grinding around the pool and causing permanent damage to its original granite bulkhead. In an effort to reduce the impact of skateboarding activity on the Unisphere site, the Parks Department built the FMCP Skate Park nearby in another underused fair-era fountain in 2010 (NYC LPC, 1995; NYC Parks, 2010).
2. **New York State Pavilion**

   The New York State Pavilion was designed by Philip Johnson for the 1964/65 World’s Fair. The four-acre site consists of three circular structures: the ‘Tent of Tomorrow’, two observation towers, and a theatre. The pavilion was retained after the fair for future use, but soon faced neglect and gradually decayed into disrepair. The theater was rehabilitated into reopened as a community theater in 1993, while the tent and towers became structurally unsound. Renewed efforts to conserve and restore the tent and towers have emerged in the last decade. The pavilion was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2009, while the tent’s rusty steel framework was repainted in 2015.

3. **Queens Theatre**

   The Queens Theatre is a performing arts center housed in a section of the New York State Pavilion built for the 1964/65 World’s Fair. The venue opened in 1993 after a $4 million conversion from the former “Theaterama” pavilion. Since 1997, the site has been operated by Queens Theatre in the Park, Inc. (QTIP), an independent nonprofit corporation. About half of QTIP’s expenses are covered with revenues from onsite programming, while the rest is covered with funds from the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs and private donors. The Queens Theatre was expanded in 2010, and now includes three spaces: a 472-seat mainstage theatre, a 99-seat studio theatre, and a modern 600-person reception space. The venue hosts 300 events each year, many of which highlight and attract the diverse population of Queens (McGladrey & Puller, LLP, 2011).

4. **New York Hall of Science**

   The New York Hall of Science (NYSCI) is a hands-on science museum first established for the 1964/65 World’s Fair. Housed in the Great Hall, it was one of the few institutions to remain open after the fair. After facing funding struggles for many years, the museum began a ten-year, $80 million expansion in 1996 to meet its growing attendance. It is operated by NYSCI, a nonprofit corporation that is among the 33 cultural organizations to operate on City-owned property and receive public support to meet their operating costs (the Cultural Institutions Group). NYSCI receives about eighty percent of its income from government and private support, while the rest is generated from admissions, workshops,
memberships, investment returns, and auxiliary activities. The museum welcomes half a million visitors a year, including tens of thousands of school children from around the city and state (NYSCI, 2016).

5. **Queens Museum**

The Queens Museum is an art museum and educational center housed in the New York City Building, which was originally built as the NYC Pavilion for the 1939/40 World’s Fair. The museum was established in 1972 in half of the building, and in 2013 concluded a $69 million effort to expand into the full building and modernize its exhibition and programming spaces. Today, the Queens Museum is among the 33 member organizations of the city’s Cultural Institutions Group, and receives both public and private operating support. In addition to art collections, the museum hosts several public programs aimed at reflecting the culture and social needs of the ethnically diverse and largely immigrant communities surrounding the park. Approximately 200,000 people attend the museum’s exhibits and programs each year (Cotter, 2013).

6. **Queens Zoo**

The Queens Zoo is an 18-acre zoo established in 1968 in the Corona section of the 1964/65 World’s Fair. The zoo houses over 90 animal species and contains an aviary geodesic dome originally built for the second fair. In 1992, the zoo reopened after a four-year, $16 million renovation. Today, it is one of four City-owned zoos (and one aquarium) to be operated by the Wildlife Conservation Society in partnership with the NYC Parks Department (WCS, 2015).

7. **Terrace on the Park**

Terrace on the Park is a banquet hall in the Heliport Building originally commissioned by the present-day Port Authority of New York and New Jersey as an “aerial gateway” for helicopter transportation during the 1964/65 World’s Fair. The building consists of four towers capped by a large top floor and helicopter-landing platform on the roof. The unique city-owned structure has continued operating as a restaurant and catering facility since the closing of the fair. Presently, Terrace on the Park is among the most lucrative of the 450 concessions currently operating in city parks throughout the five boroughs. The facility is
managed and maintained by Crystal Ball Group, Inc. through a twenty-year contract in which the business pays the city an annual license fee. Crystal Ball also pays the city a guaranteed annual fee versus a percentage of revenues generated, whichever is greater (for example, $800,000 vs. 10% for years 1-5; and $1.2 million vs. 14% for years 16-20) (FCRC, 2015).

8. **Olmsted Center**

The Olmsted Center is a one-story facility that serves as the headquarters of the Design, Construction, and Engineering Divisions of the NYC Parks Department. Named after Frederick Law Olmsted, it was originally built as a temporary structure to house the administrative offices of the 1964/65 World’s Fair Corporation. The Parks Department inherited the building after it was deemed to be structurally sound following the fair. Parks staff complained about conditions inside the building for years, citing dilapidated walls and routine flooding during rainstorms. The city allocated funds to revamp the structure in 2008, but improvements did not start until after it was submerged and damaged during Hurricane Sandy. The current renovation and expansion adds office space and addresses flooding concerns while preserving the original exposed steel exterior design (NYC Parks, 2017).

9. **Al Oerter Recreation Center**

The Al Oerter Recreation Center is one of the 35 public recreation centers owned and operated by the NYC Parks Department. Opened in 2009, the $50 million facility is located in the area of FMCP closest to downtown Flushing, and has quickly become the busiest city-owned recreational center in the five boroughs (Melnick, 2017). As with all public recreation centers, annual membership is $150 for adults; $25 for young adults, veterans, seniors, and people with disabilities; and free for children. The facility is often busy throughout the day, and serves a very diverse clientele, as reflected in the center’s multilingual communications literature. A combined sewer overflow facility was constructed beneath the center and adjoining soccer field, which retains over 40 million gallons of wastewater during storms and pumps it to a treatment plant (NYC Parks, 2014).
Figure 20. Map of FMCP Attractions
Source: Partnership for Parks, 2015
10. **FMCP Pool and Rink Center**

The Flushing Meadows-Corona Park Aquatic Center and Ice Rink is a state-of-the-art facility built in 2008 to house an Olympic-sized pool and an NHL-standard rink. Situated on 4.5 acres in the park’s historic core, the $66 million, 110,000-square feet structure is the costliest and largest recreation complex ever built in a NYC park. It was initially intended to serve as the water polo venue during the 2012 Summer Olympics, but when New York lost the bid to London in 2005, the city opted to proceed with its construction. The aquatic center operates as a standard Parks Department recreation facility, and is open to any member of the general public with an annual membership (free for children). The ice rink is a twenty-year concession to World Ice Arena, LLC which includes outfitting, management and operation through 2029. It is open daily to the general public for an admission fee. Both venues are extremely popular during public use hours and for special programs, and are the busiest public indoor pool and rink in the city, respectively (NYC EDC, 2008).

11. **Flushing Meadows Golf Center**

The Flushing Meadows Golf Center is a 13-acre site containing an outdoor pitch-and-putt facility and an 18-hole miniature golf course. Located in the historic core of the park, the venue is steps from the FMCP Pool and Rink, the National Tennis Center, the Unisphere, and the Willets Point 7-line subway station. Since 1998, the Parks Department has held a license agreement with Flushing Golf Corporation, Inc. to operate, maintain, and manage the facility, including a snack bar and food cart. A renewed 15-year agreement was signed in 2010, requiring the concessionaire to pay either a minimum in licensing fees or a percentage of its revenues each year, whichever is higher (for example, $180,000 versus 25% of green fees and 9% of food and merchandise grosses in Year 1) (The City Record, 2010).

12. **Citi Field**

Citi Field is a 45,000-seat baseball stadium completed in 2009 as the new home of Major League Baseball’s New York Mets. The $900 million venue replaced Shea Stadium, which had opened in 1964 next to the fairgrounds of the second NY World’s Fair. Similar to the FMCP Pool and Rink, Citi Field was envisioned as a venue for the 2012 Summer
Olympics, and its construction proceeded despite the city’s failed bid for the Games. Bid organizers had hastily selected the Queens site to be the main Olympic Stadium after plans for such a venue in Manhattan’s West Side faced strong opposition from local resident and business groups. The controversy surrounding the last-minute stadium change is often cited among the reasons for the International Olympic Committee’s election of London over NYC.

Upon completion, Citi Field became the first major league sports venue in New York City to be named for a corporate sponsor, following a $400 million naming rights agreement between the Mets and Citigroup, Inc. The stadium sits on a 63-acre segment of Flushing Meadows-Corona Park which also includes a series of large parking lots. The NYC Industrial Development Agency (IDA), a state-sanctioned public benefit corporation administered by the NYC Economic Development Corporation, owns the site through a 99-year ground lease from the City of New York. Meanwhile, the Queens Ballpark Company, LLC, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the New York Mets (Sterling Mets, L.P.), was created in 2005 for the sole purpose of developing, leasing, and operating Citi Field and surrounding parking sites. Under a 37.5-year lease agreement, the Mets pay the IDA an annual rent of $500,000 and an additional $500,000 if attendance surpasses two million fans. Attendance has ranged between 2 and 3 million each year since the stadium’s opening in 2009 (EMMA, 2006; Queens Ballpark Company, 2012; Levy & Chiwaya, 2016).

13. National Tennis Center

The Billie Jean King National Tennis Center is the home of the annual US Open Grand Slam tennis tournament. The 46.5-acre campus is operated by the USTA National Tennis Center Inc. (NTC), an affiliate of the US Tennis Association (USTA). NTC operates 22 courts, three stadiums (including Arthur Ashe, the world’s largest tennis venue), an indoor tennis building, parking lots, and food and beverage facilities. It also operates 11 tennis courts outside of the complex, which are open to the general public at a daily cost of $15 or $100 for full-season access.

The USTA first moved to the park in 1978, into a renovated legacy stadium from the 1964/65 World’s Fair. In 1993 it signed a 99-year lease with the NYC Parks Department to
enlarge the site from 22 to 42 acres. This expansion required the alienation\(^5\) of parkland in the historic core of FMCP, which the USTA replaced by acquiring a site four miles away that was primarily underwater marshland. The lease agreement also stipulated that the NTC would not be taxed since the site was considered public parkland, and entitled the city to collect about $500,000 in rent and $2 million as a percentage of US Open revenue each year. This compensation to the city is far below the $100 million in annual profits that the USTA typically generates during its two-week tournament in the park, which attracts over 700,000 spectators and is broadcast worldwide. The event, meanwhile, creates a burden on the local police force and other city resources, and significantly limits public access to large sections of the park that are cordoned off for parking and security purposes.

The center is currently undergoing a $550 million renovation that includes a retractable roof over Arthur Ashe Stadium, replacement of the old Grandstand and Louis Armstrong Stadiums with new and larger venues, and alienation of additional parkland. In order to win city council approval for this expansion, the USTA signed a community benefits agreement in 2013 committing $10.05 million in ongoing funding for FMCP over 23 years ($5.05 million for programming and upkeep, and $5 million for the relocation of a road). The funding helped underwrite the creation of the FMCP Alliance, a public-private partnership formed to administer the $5.05 million allocated for park programming and maintenance (NYC Parks, 2012; FC Queens, 2013).

Flushing Meadows-Corona Park contains a host of other amenities and attractions throughout its hundreds of acres, including several holdovers from the 1939/40 and 1964/65 Fairs. The Passerelle, an elevated pedestrian ramp built as the primary entrance gate to the second Fair, continues to provide a critical link between the FMCP core and the No. 7 subway line and Long Island Rail Road commuter line. The building beneath the ramp houses the City Parks Foundation and several Parks Department units. The core also encompasses six major fountains and pools marking focal points of the original radial Beaux-Arts plan. The central pool sits under the Unisphere, while the neglected Fountain of the Planets—the largest fountain at

\(^{5}\) Parkland alienation refers to the sale, lease, or discontinued use of municipal parkland and its conveyance to a non-public enterprise.
nearly seven acres—was the controversial site of a proposed 25,000-seat Major League Soccer (MLS) stadium for the new NYC Football Club. The MLS and NYC-FC withdrew their stadium efforts in 2013 after strong opposition from local residents and park advocates led by the Queens Fairness Coalition (“Queens FC”) (Trapasso, 2013).

In addition to the Unisphere, ten monuments and sculptures from the World’s Fairs are scattered throughout the park. These include a time capsule from each Fair buried near the Passerelle, an ancient Roman marble column presented by King Hussein of Jordan during the second Fair, and the Rocket Thrower, a forty-foot-tall bronze and gold sculpture from the second Fair that underwent a major restoration in 2013.

Near the Queens Zoo, the refurbished FMCP Carousel dating back to 1964 is one of four city-owned carousels operating under concession. Across the Carousel, the Playground for All Children was established in 1984 as the nation’s first public play area for disabled and able-bodied children. Seven acres of parkland near the NY State Pavilion serve as a dedicated site for public festivals (and remain open to the public when there are no festivals). Adjacent to the festival site is the Garden of Meditation, which includes a large stone bench commemorating the location of the Vatican Pavilion at the second Fair.

In the Meadow Lake section, a snack bar and bike rental operate inside a 1964 Fair-era structure on Ederle Terrace under concession to Corona Park Café, Inc. The nearby Boathouse, built for the first Fair, is managed by NYC Parks and used by the American Small Craft Association, Row New York, and the annual Hong Kong Dragon Boat Festival. There are also eight permanent playgrounds (that include basketball and handball courts), nine soccer fields, seven baseball fields, three cricket fields, and two volleyball court areas dispersed throughout the park. Eleven public tennis courts in the park are operated by the National Tennis Center. Five prescribed picnic and BBQ grounds are mostly situated around Meadow Lake, though the northern core is also popular with picnickers, grillers, and formal and informal food vendors.
6. Present Challenges

In total, Flushing Meadows-Corona Park has more than fifty amenities and attractions throughout its vast campus. This assortment of cultural institutions, professional sports facilities, athletic fields, recreational grounds, multi-year concessions, administrative buildings, sculptures, monuments, fountains, pools, and lakes makes the Queens park a patently unique destination for local and non-local visitors alike. At the same time, the management and maintenance of such a complex setting presents a substantial challenge for the Parks Department, which in addition to FMCP is responsible for over 27,000 acres of parkland throughout New York City. The following review of existing conditions and areas of concern at Flushing Meadows helps to shed light on this enduring challenge.

Functional Space

The spatial extent of Flushing Meadows-Corona Park has been a point of ambiguity virtually since its inception. The original site created for the 1939/40 World’s Fair was registered at 1,031 acres. For decades after, the park was believed to encompass more than 1,250 acres, making it nearly twice as big as Central Park, as well as the largest park in Queens and third largest citywide.

In 2010, the NYC Parks Department began re-measuring every park in its system using modern mapping software and satellite technology. Many parks grew or shrunk in official size during this exercise, which accounted for details not included in the antiquated city records. No park was reduced more than Flushing Meadows, however, due to a previous failure to subtract the space occupied by Moses’ web of freeways that run through the park. These include the Grand Central Parkway, Van Wyck Expressway, Long Island Expressway, and Jewel Avenue. The park’s size was adjusted to 897.6 acres, which constitutes the area officially mapped as parkland, and includes undeveloped lots and land underwater (Foderaro, 2013).

However, a recent inspection under the Parks Inspection Program (PIP) found that only about 572 of these acres are “functional,” meaning that they are generally useable by the public.
and maintained by the Parks Department. This functional acreage excludes undeveloped lots, land underwater, and parkland used for other purposes, which together occupy nearly forty percent of Flushing Meadows-Corona Park (NYC Parks, 2016). It is unclear whether the PIP study takes into consideration the recent alienation of 4 acres of parkland for the National Tennis Center expansion. The difference of over 300 acres between FMCP’s total acreage and functional acreage further adds to the evolving understanding of the park’s actual extent, its limited access from surrounding neighborhoods, and the need to preserve the park’s dwindling publicly useable areas.

**Design & Connectivity**

Before the 1939/40 World’s Fair, Robert Moses envisioned Flushing Meadows-Corona Park as a grand public park that would be realized with funds from the two-year spectacle. The park’s Beaux-Arts plan attested to his vision of creating a “Versailles for the people.” This design, with some alterations, was partially implemented by Gilmore Clarke for the first World’s Fair. However, the financial failure of the fair left organizers bankrupt and with no funds in the coffers to pay for the park’s full transformation.

The same fate would face the second World’s Fair three decades later, as revenue from the event was barely enough to cover its expenses. The 1964 World’s Fair retained the layout to a high level of fidelity, including the major and minor axes of the round-point plan. Three years after the fair, a public park was finally dedicated in 1967, albeit as a much more modest and thrifty version of the original design elaborated by Clarke.

Today, the original Beaux-Arts plan of the fairgrounds remains nearly intact, and is one of the features that makes FMCP a unique setting. Flushing Meadows continues to be the sole large-scale park in New York City designed in the formal French garden style, and it follows the tradition of great European formal gardens that eventually became public spaces. However, the legibility of the landscape has become considerably unintelligible. The park has struggled to sustain the principles of symmetry and order as more development and programming ventures emerge throughout the park. Long-term neglect of monuments and
installations located at focal points of the radial plan have created confusion about how the public should be use and perceive them.

This present condition is a result, at least partly, of years of inadequate and inconsistent planting of trees, the removal of arterial boulevards, and a general lack of grounds maintenance. The loss of legibility has thus affected the image, usage, and perception of Flushing Meadows-Corona Park. Indeed, park visitors often cite the wide paths to be confusing, wayfinding to be difficult, and access into the park from neighboring communities to be limited. Access has emerged as a top concern of the increasingly dense and diverse surrounding neighborhoods. The initial decision to completely enclose FMCP with freeways, coupled with the limited number of pedestrian overpasses into the park, has kept access into the park at virtually the same level as decades ago, when the surrounding population was much smaller.

**Neighboring Communities**

Stretching three and a half miles north-south through the center of Queens, Flushing Meadows-Corona Park is situated between a range of neighborhoods with unique demographic compositions. The northern core of the park is bordered by the dense communities of Corona, Elmhurst, and Flushing. These neighborhoods are predominantly home to low- and middle-class families, and together are among the most ethnically diverse districts in the nation.

To the west of the park’s northern core are South Corona and Elmhurst, both heavily Hispanic and immigrant communities. To its northwest are North Corona and East Elmhurst, which have a mix of Latino, African-American, and West Indian populations. East of the northern core is the predominantly Asian district of Flushing. South of these neighborhoods is Rego Park, with a large South Asian population. Along the southern half of the park are Forest Hills and Kew Gardens Hills, which are predominantly white and more affluent, and are home to large Jewish communities. Its community profiles are significantly different from those of the northern sections, including fewer residents with limited English proficiency, greater access to
fresh foods, and lower rates of poverty (see Table 9 for more details). These areas also enjoy a
greater number of street trees, green spaces, spacious lawns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community District</th>
<th>Foreign Born</th>
<th>Have Limited English proficiency</th>
<th>Air pollution (micrograms of fine particulate matter per cubic meter)</th>
<th>Supermarket square footage (per 100 people)</th>
<th>Attended College (adults 25+)</th>
<th>Poverty Rate (federal poverty line)</th>
<th>Any physical activity in the last 30 days</th>
<th>Obesity (percent of adults)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NYC Average</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elmhurst and Corona</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson Heights</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rego Park</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest Hills</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flushing and Whitestone</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillcrest and Fresh</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meadows</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NYC Health, 2015

Cultural preferences from the diverse communities are reflected in the activities seen
throughout the length of the park. For instance, in the northern core, the surrounding
immigrant and Hispanic residents heavily use the park to play soccer and volleyball. In recent
years, the Parks Department has needed to add new soccer fields, improve existing ones, and
build new volleyball courts to accommodate increased demand for the sports in this section of
the park (Honan, 2013). Meanwhile, cricket fields line the area of the park closest to Rego Park,
home to a large South Asian community.

In particular, FMCP serves as the principal and largest public space for the residents of
Corona, Elmhurst, Flushing and Jackson Heights. These districts are densely populated,
quickly-growing, and face severe shortages of open and green space. Their supply of open
space lags far behind the city’s standard of 2.5 acres per one thousand residents (Leicht, 2013).
With their youth populations on the rise—nearly a quarter of all residents are eighteen years or
younger—the need for additional public and recreational land is expected to intensify. The
preservation of park space that is open, free, accessible and green, and which can be used for
a range of recreational activities, is thus especially important for these communities.
The social and economic variation among FMCP's neighboring communities bears significant influence on the function and operations of the park. Different communities have distinct relationships with the park, and often conflicting values concerning its future uses, improvements and preservation. Such was the case during the formation of a Community Advisory Board (CAB) in 2016 which brought together up to fifty community and civic organizations engaged in and around the park. The independent CAB was created to provide guidance on community spending priorities to the Alliance for Flushing Meadows Corona Park ("FMCP Alliance"), a nonprofit established in 2015 to fundraise for maintenance and improvement of the park.
Figure 22. Neighborhoods Surrounding Flushing Meadows-Corona Park in Queens

Source: Author, 2017
Unlike most other community-based committees created to advise park conservancy groups, the CAB holds one seat and a vote on the Alliance’s fifteen-member board of directors. In late 2015, the CAB members were tasked with electing one representative to serve on the board. During the process of organizing the CAB, tensions arose among community members who disagreed on the group’s mission and core values. As a result, in March 2016 the Pratt Center for Community Development was enlisted to help guide the diverse CAB membership in developing its mission, organizational structure, and initial goals (Pratt Center, 2017).

**Private Activity**

Public parks are a source of revenue for the City of New York, which collects more than $110 million in revenue from a variety of sources including concessions, special events, dockage, and lease agreements such as those with the Mets (Citi Field), Yankees (Yankee Stadium) and US Tennis Association (National Tennis Center). In particular, the Parks Department is responsible for monitoring and collecting payments from more than 500 concessionaires that operate or generate revenue on public parkland citywide. In 2016, these parkland concessions—which include food services, ice rinks, stables, marinas, and golf courses—generated over ninety percent of the city’s total concession revenue.

Furthermore, the New York City Charter states that “All revenues of the city, of every administration, department, board, office and commission thereof, and of every borough, county and other division of government within the city, from whatsoever source except taxes on real estate, not required by law to be paid into any other fund or account shall be paid into a fund to be termed the ‘general fund’” (NYCC, 2017). Most concession income generated and collected by the Parks Department therefore does not stay within the agency for park operations and improvements. The only exceptions are fees collected at Parks-operated recreation centers and grants received through the Adopt-A-Park program. As a result, Flushing Meadows, which is one of the most lucrative public parks for the city due to its numerous concessions, does not directly benefit financially from the extensive private activity that takes place in its quarters.
‘Developable’ Land

Flushing Meadows-Corona Park has been persistently threatened by the encroachment of private development. The vast open public spaces dispersed throughout the park are often seen as underused land and as opportunities for development by both public and private entities. As described above, the City of New York has a vested interest in permitting private operations on public parklands, as these concessions generate substantial income for the General City Fund. This context has facilitated the city’s practice of granting access to the development of profit-generating facilities on public parklands.

The first notable example of private development (other than the two World’s Fairs) in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park came in 1961, when the city agreed to lease nearly 100 acres of the park to the New York Mets for the construction of a stadium and parking lots. This parkland alienation required state legislative action and approval by the Governor. The Mets signed a thirty-year lease to operate the 55,000-seat Shea Stadium and surrounding parking sites, paying the city an annual rent of $300,000 to $450,000. Though not officially part of the fair, Shea Stadium held its inaugural Mets game just five days before the opening of the 64/65 World’s Fair.

In 1966, Parks Commissioner Thomas Hoving proposed transforming FMCP into a sprawling sports complex that could accommodate an Olympic Games. Proposals for the park’s redesign sought to create a modernized campus, replacing the original Beaux-Arts plan and overlooking some of the park’s iconic features. While Hoving’s plan did not materialize, professional sport organizations have continued to perceive the park as a potential host for their new development ventures.

In 1983, for example, a proposal emerged to host an annual Formula One Grand Prix Race on a 2.5-mile course that would be built around Meadow Lake. The plan caused immediate opposition from local residents, including Kew Garden Hills Civic Association president Benjamin Haber, who stated “We gave up a piece of the park for Shea Stadium. We gave up a piece of the park for the tennis center, and now they want more for parking. We are terrified at the slow erosion of the park and feel that we are going to wake up one day and find that our park is gone” (Carmody, 1983). Still, support for the Grand Prix plan from the Queens
 Borough President and several former public officials served as a reminder of the city’s role in enabling such development prospects for the park.

In 1993, another major segment of Flushing Meadows was privatized when the city leased 42 acres of parkland to the USTA for the expansion of the National Tennis Center. The 99-year ground lease authorized the city to collect nearly $500,000 in rent and $2 million as a percentage of revenue each year, well below the estimated $100 million profit collected by the USTA during its two-week US Open tournament. An ongoing City-sanctioned redevelopment of the National Tennis Center has resulted in the further alienation of four acres of parkland at FMCP.

In 2005, Flushing Meadows was featured as a central event cluster in the New York City bid to host the 2012 Summer Olympic Games. The bid was managed by NYC2012, a private nonprofit organization, and was strongly supported by then-Mayor Michael Bloomberg. FMCP was to host Olympic archery, rowing, canoeing, tennis and water polo events. Bid plans proposed considerable changes to the park’s landscape, including the dredging and merging of Meadow and Willow Lakes into one 2,000-meter rowing and canoeing course. In addition, Mayor Bloomberg announced that the Olympic water polo venue to be built in the park would be converted into a public pool and ice-skating rink after the Games. Days before the final vote, NYC2012 announced that the main Olympic Stadium would also be built in the park, replacing Shea Stadium, after plans for a central stadium in Manhattan’s West Side fell through. None of these visions for the park were developed through in-depth consultation with community groups or local residents whose daily lives and access to FMCP would have almost certainly been impacted by the staging of the world’s largest mega-event in their local park (Steinhauer, 2004).

Despite the city’s failure to secure the 2012 Olympics, the attention drawn to Flushing Meadows during the bid contributed to the subsequent onset of proposed and completed development projects in and around the park. In 2008, the promised indoor Olympic-size pool and NHL-standard rink opened to the public in the largest and most expensive recreation facility ever built on NYC parkland. Citi Field opened the following year, retaining some of the designs initially proposed during its consideration as the Olympic Stadium. The Al Oerter
Recreation Center also opened in 2009, named after the Olympic gold medalist discus thrower born in Queens.

In 2012, three private development proposals surfaced around the same time: the expansion of the USTA National Tennis Center, the construction of a new Major League Soccer stadium, and the redevelopment of the Willets Point district. The Tennis Center expansion required the further alienation of an acre of parkland, while the MLS stadium proposed to occupy thirteen acres in the historic core, including the Fountain of the Planets. Meanwhile, developers of the Willets Point project proposed to take up 30 acres of FMCP (on the parking lots of Citi Field, which are leased parkland) and 62 acres of adjacent non-parkland in Willets Point, to develop a new massive shopping and living district.

All three projects were met with considerable opposition, primarily organized by two community organizations, the *Fairness Coalition of Queens* and *Save Flushing Meadows-Corona Park!* Despite having different owners, these three projects were perceived by community groups and stakeholders as a single unified threat to the park, and the largest push towards privatization that the park had faced since its inception. The organized opposition to these projects were equally important, as they represented the priorities and concerns of a local voice that is often overlooked in the private development plans for the park.
7. Analysis

Summary of Findings

+ The legacy of mega events is influenced by the post-event use of main grounds and venues.
+ The legacy of post-event parks is challenged by scale, cost of maintaining grounds and event holdovers, preservation of important landmarks, and relationship with neighboring communities.
+ Very few legacy parks are purely publicly-owned, financed, and managed.
+ Legacy parks often depend on public/private partnerships for their sustained management and programming.
+ The FMCP Alliance can extend its role beyond fundraising, into management of the park.
+ FMCP can leverage its role as an historic and multiuse space to expand financial support.
+ FMCP can improve community relations while welcoming urban festivals and other revenue-generating sources into the park.

In assessing Flushing Meadow-Corona Park through the lens of the literature reviewed, the park is determined to be a unique landscape with an uncertain identity and future path. As the legacy park of two momentous mega-events, FMCP continues to contribute special value to the residents of New York City. The park is first and foremost a civic campus housing a series of functions intended for the consumption of local and non-local visitors alike. The conversion from World’s Fair site into public space, though not as grand as Moses hoped, cannot be underestimated. Mega-event host cities across the globe have either opted to privatize much of their event grounds, as in the case of the Rio’s Barra Olympic Park, or have been unable to successfully repurpose the grounds into consistently active space, as in the case of Athens’ Olympic Park. In this sense, the case of FMCP is consistent with Kasimati and others who claim that such large-scale events create long-term sociospatial benefits for the host city.

At the same time, both fairs required substantial investment that in the end could not be fully recuperated, derailing plans for the post-development of a grand city park. This
circumstance is consistent with Flyvbjerg, Stewart and others who assert that mega-events are consistently financial disasters that consume more resources than they generate. The case of Flushing Meadows served to show the prioritization of the mega-event before the legacy for the host city that is persistent evident in the organization of large-scale international spectacles. This increased import given to staging the World’s Fairs, at the expense of funds allocated for the post-fair park plans, have had enduring consequences on the use, maintenance and identity of Flushing Meadows. A prime example are the wide paths meant to accommodate tens of thousands of people at once, which now are not conducive for the more modest scale and functions of a public park. Another instance is the constant flooding throughout the park during heavy rainfall, due to inadequate plumbing infrastructure built for temporary occasions.

When compared to the four sub-case studies reviewed, Flushing Meadows-Corona Park more prominently stands out as a unique public space. Not one of the four sites functions as a city-owned and operated municipal public park, as does FMCP. Rather, HemisFair Park and Seattle Center are city-owned parklands whose operations are primarily supported through concessions, onsite commercial event, and private sponsorship. Similarly, Exposition Park and Centennial Olympic Park are state-owned public spaces financed largely through public-private activities on their campuses. The fact that all four sites embrace private-sector involvement in their programming and upkeep indicates that their municipalities have a clearer understanding of post-event legacy spaces as unusual places. Event legacy grounds rarely operate as traditional public urban parks, as their unique set of facilities and functions, their access and scale, among other features, often require distinct management and funding approaches.

Is FMCP a Public Park?

From its origins as the fairgrounds of two paid-admission mega-events, the site has raised questions about the best uses and management of large public open spaces. Despite being just another one of the 1,700 public parks in New York City, Flushing Meadows has never operated as a ‘normal’ public urban park.
At its neatest, FMCP is a series of three distinct parks spread across four miles and nestled between a web of freeways and at least six ethnically diverse neighborhoods. The Flushing Meadows of today is characterized by crumbling relics, next to birthday parties, next to soccer matches, next to the nation’s largest tennis event, all squeezed in between formal French garden-style boulevards and twelve-lane expressways. Meanwhile, the park is among the few in the city to constitute its own Parks Department district, enjoying its own dedicated maintenance staff and resources.

The muddled identities and uses of Flushing Meadows are further compounded by the park’s association with Robert Moses. His grand visions for FMCP reflected a yearning to one-up Central Park. Moses sought to create not just an orderly Beaux-Arts sanctuary, but also a utilitarian recreational campus for the city’s growing population, a complex of attractions and entertainment venues, and a critical nexus for his expansive freeway network. As a result, FMCP was never destined to operate as a standard public park. Rather, Flushing Meadows reflects Moses’ influential knack for using his multiple unelected positions, including that of NYC Parks Commissioner, to build highways and other large projects that would drastically alter the landscape of New York City.

Yet another layer that increasingly defines the park is its incredibly varied clientele. For one, the neighborhoods that surround Flushing Meadows are among the most ethnically diverse in the nation, a reality that impacts their relationship with and patronage of the park considerably. In addition to social and economic differences among neighboring communities, the park must also consider its diversity of stakeholder types. Local users constitute one group, but FMCP and its attractions also appeal to non-local users from other parts of the city, state, and beyond. The US Open attracts an audience of over 750,000 people in a two-week span, while the New York Mets regularly welcome more than 2 million fans from around the metro area during the baseball season. Another subset of stakeholders are preservationists concerned with the conservation of parkland and features with historical significance. Further, the park brings together aficionados of the World’s Fairs and other similar
events. The final group of stakeholders is the NYC Parks Department itself. In addition to the staff that maintain the park, the department relies on the vastness of FMCP to host several administrative uses and to generate millions of dollars for the city each year through concessions and land leases.

The administration of Flushing Meadows-Corona Park is therefore no simple operation. For decades, the city has struggled to properly maintain the sprawling parklands, and manage the various features scattered throughout. As remnants from the fairs increase in age, so too does the cost for their upkeep and preservation. Meanwhile, chronic flooding and other ecological issues serve as a reminder of the park’s foundation built over tidal marshlands. Further, the city’s park budget, which was previously a fiscal priority, never recovered from the severe cuts during the fiscal crisis of the 1970s and 80s. Today, while the NYC parks system surpasses other major American cities in size and scale, it lags far behind in spending per acre, staffing per acre, and portion of the total city budget devoted to parks (Trust for Public Land, 2017).

The case of FMCP is in line with Kohn and Carmona’s assertion that the conventional “public versus private” dichotomy in open space discourse fails to address the nuanced management necessary for contemporary public spaces. Flushing Meadows does not fall neatly into Carmona’s broad definition of public space as a place “where public access is unrestricted,” since hundreds of acres of the park are reserved and restricted for private functions. Rather, FMCP encompasses an assortment of free and unrestricted spaces, alongside privately-run facilities with often restricted access. Yet, the free and open spaces are at times cordoned off for private or commercial purposes, such as the use of green spaces as paid parking lots during the US Open (see Figure 23), while the privately-managed spaces are often made accessible to the general public, as in the case of the Hall of Science parking lot which gets heavily used by locals for informal soccer matches and barbeques.
Many major city parks began forming partnerships with private enterprises to fund and manage parklands after the crisis. Public-private entities such as the Central Park Conservancy and Bryant Park Corporation have become invaluable to the revitalization and/or improvement of their namesake parks. Of the case study sites, both Seattle Center and HemisFair Park formed conservancies to raise additional funds and manage improvement efforts.

However, the approach has been criticized because it reduces parks as a priority in the budgeting process. As Swan suggests, city parks are "being handed off to the highest bidder, as commercial opportunities for private companies with virtually no public input, transparency or control" (2013).

Until recently, Flushing Meadows-Corona Park was among the few remaining large NYC parks without a conservancy or other operational avenue by which to garner private sector
support, despite the multiple concessions across its campus. As most concession revenue goes into the city’s General Fund, FMCP also did not benefit—in the form of direct funds for park maintenance and improvement—as a result of these public-private business agreements.

**FMCP Alliance**

The formation of the Alliance for Flushing Meadows-Corona Park in 2015 presents opportunities to strategically address the park’s future management and functional prospects. The Alliance is a nonprofit corporation with a 15-member board that was primarily established to administer $10.05 million that the US Tennis Association pledged in 2013 for park improvements and programming. The USTA committed these funds as part of a community benefit agreement in which the city allowed the expansion of the National Tennis Center and additional parkland alienation in the heart of Flushing Meadows. Just over half of the funds were granted to the FMCP Alliance for park programming and upkeep. These funds are being disbursed to the alliance over the next 23 years ($350,000 annually the first 3 years, and $200,000 annually for the following 20 years). The USTA is spending the remaining $5 million on the rerouting of a park road that will facilitate vehicular access into the tennis complex. The community benefit agreement was established in addition to the $500,000 in annual rent which the USTA pays the city under the 99-lease agreement for the National Tennis Center.

Through the FMCP Alliance, Flushing Meadows has the potential not just to generate additional funds for its upkeep, but to also assess new approaches for managing its complex campus. The Alliance may serve as a platform to explore new fundraising campaigns and collaborations to restore and preserve remnants of the World’s Fairs. It may also employ creative solutions to the challenge of accommodating private festivals and events in the park. It can strengthen ties between the many cultural institutions that call the park home. In summary, the Alliance can focus on pressing issues that have plagued the park for long, but which have not been thoroughly addressed because of the Parks Department’s responsibility over hundreds of other parks. The following section provides some ideas for harnessing the FMCP Alliance for the improved reuse and management of the park.
**Improving Community Relations**

While the Fairness Coalition of Queens defended the creation of a public-private alliance to maintain the park, not everyone was happy with the partnership. Some community members felt that the adequate funding of public parks was the responsibility of elected officials, and not private business. Others thought that the USTA’s $10 million commitment to supporting park improvements was too low, especially when considering the park’s steep upkeep and programming costs; the loss of precious parkland in the heart of Flushing Meadows; and the $100 million in revenues that the USTA makes each year from staging the US Open. Still others expressed concern about the tournament’s disruption of the park environs, with cars and trucks taking over public green spaces, and the USTA’s continued encroachment on public parkland.

Another focal point in the discourse on private involvement in parklands is the belief that such arrangements enable the wholesale loss of open, free and accessible public space. Open space advocates worry that wealthy donors may have influence over who gets access to park facilities. As Swan notes, “The boards of these Conservancies and BIDs now controlling our public parks tend to be comprised of privately-selected CEOs of real estate, retail companies, law firms and banks” (2013). Further, efforts to make parks self-sustaining can lead them to become commercial developments. In Bryant Park, for instance, the growth of events has caused some concern that the park will be dominated by private entities and become inaccessible to the public. The Bryant Park Corporation—the private management nonprofit that has a long-term lease to operate the park—has in recent years pledged to make all events free and open to the public, in order to assuage fears of the park being lost to private interests.

Despite the legalities between a city and a conservancy, it is important to share the message that the real owners of the park are the people who use it. Neglecting to properly engage the surrounding communities has stumped conservancies in the past. Board members or allied community members cannot alone disseminate ideas. Rather, the FMCP Alliance should aim to increase its outreach to neighbors and park users, and develop a notable roster of community-focused programming before it embarks on any capital campaigns.
Some of the city’s best maintained parks, including Bryant and Prospect Parks, have been largely improved and maintained by private conservancies that are able to raise considerable funds to operate programs and hire staff (including maintenance staff) under contract with the NYC Parks Department. For instance, in 2013, the department contributed only forty percent of operating costs for Prospect Park. This also presents a problem for maintenance, as some conservancies grant permission to use parks for events, but leave day-to-day park cleanup to be covered by the city’s budget.

On the other hand, some parks that rely heavily on city funds and lack community and financial involvement have fallen into disrepair. For decades, Flushing Meadows has been among the largest city parks to lean towards this category. The discrepancy is clear between the more prominent parks that can raise significant private resources, and other mostly outer-borough parks that struggle for even the minimum levels of staff, services, cleanliness and security. Conservancies, therefore, may prove successful for some parks in the city, but not all parks have the financial capacity and resources available within their neighborhoods to support an organization that can achieve anywhere near the annual revenues of the Central Park Conservancy ($38.9 million) or the Friends of the High Line ($23.5 million) (Harnik & Martin, 2015).6

6 At $38.9 and $23.5 million in annual revenue, the Central Park Conservancy and Friends of the High Line, respectively, were the top-earning conservancies in the nation between 2009 and 2012, according to the Partnership for Parks. Seven other New York City conservancies were among the top earners, including the Prospect Park Alliance ($9.9 million) and the Randall’s Island Park Alliance ($6.1 million).
As a result, key challenge facing the FMCP Alliance and other park conservancies outside of very wealthy neighborhoods is securing donor support from neighboring communities that are not as affluent as those which surround Central Park and the High Line. In the case of Flushing Meadows, the neighborhoods surrounding the busy northern core are primarily made up of immigrant, low- and middle-income families with limited disposable funds to contribute to park maintenance. Meanwhile, the park also abuts more affluent neighborhoods in the southern sections that would be more capable of supporting the alliance. However, the relationship between these neighborhoods and Flushing Meadows is severely disrupted by the extensive highways that enclose the park, and the limited number of overpasses connecting them to the park. As a result, residents in these areas do not have the quick access to FMCP that neighborhoods near the northern core enjoy. In addition, the middle-class neighborhoods of Forest Hills and Kew Garden Hills have a number of smaller neighborhood parks and private green spaces that their residents can enjoy.

The FMCP Alliance had the benefit of obtaining $5 million in initial funds from the USTA to kick start programming and improvements around the park. This form of collaboration with private stakeholders engaged in the park is welcome, but is not the only approach to fundraising. The alliance can also develop a community outreach campaign that acknowledges the diversity of neighbors surrounding the park, to better understand the different priorities and concerns of community members regarding the park’s current and future uses. The alliance can build on the extensive work that the Community Design School, a collaboration launched in 2014 between the Parks Department and the Design Trust for Public Space. The collaborative effort pioneered a new model of participatory planning in Queens, working with local residents—‘community advisors’—from every neighborhood surrounding the park, to develop proposals for improved access, connectivity, and circulation around FMCP.

The Community Design School employed a community planning process that equips local residents with the education necessary to produce recommendations for the improvement of the park. It empowers community members to formulate and initiate the improvements they want to see in their park—not just react to outside plans. The team
produced a report in 2016 summarizing its community-driver design effort (Holleran, Lidgus, & Serrano-McClain, 2016).

Rebranding

Flushing Meadows-Corona Park suffers from an identity crisis. As explained previously, the park is actually a series of at least three sections that are each defined by very distinct landscapes, amenities, and surrounding neighborhoods. A key reason for this challenge is the park’s dual purpose of serving as a recreational space and as a conduit for the construction of new highways. The main recreational grounds were primarily focused in the northern section near Corona and Flushing, while most of the narrow southern sections were taken up by Meadow Lake, Willow Lake, the Grand Central Parkway, and the Van Wyck Expressway. The lakes served as rudimentary storm water treatment plants, where runoff from the surrounding highways was able to settle, allowing “cleaner” water to flow back into the Flushing Bay, but the sediments remained in the lakes.

In order to address the identity challenge, two interventions are proposed. The first is a name change for the park to a label that more accurately reflects the variety of neighborhoods throughout Queens that consider the park an important piece of their community. While Corona and Flushing are certainly the closest to the core, residents from Elmhurst, Jackson Heights, Forest Hills, Rego Park, and Kew Garden Hills also frequent the park. As such, a name that is less specific to just two communities may encourage others to want to contribute to the park’s improvement. Furthermore, these neighborhoods are also among the more affluent communities surrounding the park, and their contribution to any fundraising efforts of the FMCP Alliance would be critical. Potential renaming of the park—and alliance—should reflect the site’s historic background while also providing a memorable, appealing, and unifying identity to the park and its amenities. Possible names include “Unisphere Park” or “World’s Fair Park.”

The rebranding of FMCP, exactly fifty years after its inauguration in 1967, will serve as an acknowledgement of the park’s ever-evolving role and significance since last hosting the largest mega-events in New York City. Today, it has become the premier public open space
for Queens, as well as a regional and international destination. In addition, the renaming will support the effort to create a cohesive identity for the major institutions and facilities that are based in the park. Cultural institutions such as the Queens Museum, Hall of Science, Queens Theatre and Queens Zoo are all within minutes of each other. However, they are often perceived by visitors as standalone destinations rather than constituents of an integrated campus. Their proximity to one another, and their shared home on Flushing Meadows, can be leveraged as a selling point in fundraising efforts for the FMCP Alliance. Each facility can incorporate a label that highlights it as a proud member of the park family. For example, all institutions at Exposition Park in Los Angeles have added the “Expo Park” logo under their own logo. This has the dual function of conveying a group of attractions in one place, and of increasing the overall profile of the park itself. In New York, one example can be “The Queens Museum at Unisphere Park.”

**Figure 25. Proposed Institution Logos after Park Rebranding**

Sources: CPC 2016; FHL 2016; BPC 2015; PPA 2015; RIPA 2017

**Leveraging Events**

A final area for which the FMCP Alliance should consider a renewed approach is the staging of commercial events on public parklands. Cities around the world are staging more events than ever. Within this macro-trend exists an emerging sub-trend: more events are being staged in public spaces. Some events have been staged in parks, streets and squares for years. However, in recent years, an increasing number of sports, music, and cultural festivals have been taken out of traditional venues and staged in outdoor public spaces. This is favored by organizers seeking more memorable and prominent events, but also by municipal authorities seeking to animate their public realm and promote their cities.
Commercial events present an opportunity for FMCP to generate additional revenue for park improvements and capital projects. All of the sub-case study sites observed—namely Exposition Park in Los Angeles, Hemisfair Park in San Antonio, Seattle Center in Seattle, and Centennial Olympic Park in Atlanta—depend significantly on revenues generated from staging commercial events on their property. In fact, Exposition Park generates much of its annual profits from large paid-admission festivals hosted on its parking lots. These revenues have allowed the park to be fully self-sustained, receiving no public support for maintenance.

Yet, between 2014 and 2016, the NYC Parks Department rejected a series of permit requests from event organizers seeking to host multiple-day events on the grounds of Flushing Meadows-Corona Park. Three companies—AEG Live, Founders Entertainment and Madison Square Garden—applied twice to hold music festivals in FMCP over the summer, and were twice turned down. Elected officials cited that the city had no official policy “for for-profit organizations to run paid-admission events” and that until a policy is put in place, all applications would be rejected. It is not clear whether the city is presently working on an official policy for large for-profit events (Matua, 2016).

The city officials noted that while Flushing Meadows regularly hosts smaller-scale music and cultural festivals, their decision was specifically directed at large-scale, for-profit events. However, commercial festivals of this sort regularly take place on city-owned parkland across the five boroughs. For example, the New York Fashion Week took place in Bryant Park for fifteen years—closing access to the public two weeks each year—until its move to Lincoln Center in 2010. Similarly, the multi-day Governors Ball Music Festival initially occupied a section of Governor’s Island, which is operated as a public park, until its move to Randall’s Island Park in 2012. Two new multi-day music festivals based in New York City were inaugurated in 2016: The Panorama Music Festival presented by Goldenvoice (producers of the famed Coachella Festival in California) and the Meadows Music & Arts Festival produced by Founders Entertainment. The Panorama festival, named after the scale model of New York City exhibited at the Queens Museum, was among the three events rejected at Flushing Meadows.

The 2017 Governors Ball and Panorama festivals will both take place at Randall’s Island Park, which is located on an isle between Manhattan, Queens, and the Bronx. The city-owned
park is operated by the Randall’s Island Park Alliance (RIPA), a public-private partnership founded in 1992 to develop sports and recreational facilities, maintain the park, and restore its natural environment. The staging of multi-day festivals is a key reason behind RIPA’s recent financial success. In 2015, the alliance generated over $6 million in revenue, behind only the Central Park Conservancy, Friends of the High Line, and Prospect Park Alliance among top-earning conservancies in New York City (Harnik & Martin, 2015).

Perhaps most unusual is the fact that for-profit, large-scale events also already occur in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park. The World Maker Faire, for example, has taken place in the park since 2010. This two-day, paid-admission science fair is hosted by the New York Hall of Science (NYSCI) in partnership with Maker Media Inc., a privately held company that produces similar fairs in several cities. A record 90,000 people attended the World Maker Faire in 2015 (NYSCI, 2017). The fair occupies and cordons off the parking lot of the museum, which otherwise serves as a main entry point into FMCP from Corona, and is heavily used by local residents for soccer and other recreational activities.

Meanwhile, the inaugural Meadows Music & Arts Festival took place in FMCP over three days in October 2016. Organizers did not need to seek approval from the Parks Department, despite the use of public parkland, because the event was held on the privately-managed Citi Field parking lots. Following a successful attendance of over 80,000 paid visitors, the Meadows Festival will return for a second year in September 2017. In addition to the Meadows Festival, the Citi Field parking lots have also hosted the Electric Daisy Carnival, a three-day music and entertainment festival, in recent years.

The recent decision to reject major commercial events at Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, therefore, is inconsistent with the approval of other for-profit large-scale events in the park and public spaces across the city. The decision precludes a proactive effort to develop legislation regarding the hosting of large scale events in public spaces. Further, the decision sheds light on the reality that public parklands operating under private management enjoy greater flexibility in their event programming and fundraising efforts than do conventional city-operated public parks. The Maker Faire at NYSCI, Meadows festival at Citi Field, and Panorama festival at Randall’s Island Park are three such examples.
Given these conditions, the FMCP Alliance has an opportunity to reconsider the prospects of permitting large-scale commercial events in the park as an avenue to generate funds for park upkeep. The evident emergence of urban festivals, and particularly those staged in public spaces, require a proactive response from municipalities in efficiently incorporating them into city life. Community benefit agreements can be embedded into the regulations for urban events staged in public spaces, requiring organizers to accommodate stated community needs and preferences, and to strive to create local economic and social benefits. The Community Design School findings on connectivity and access can be incorporated into event plans, ensuring that key sections of the park remain accessible to the public.

Meanwhile, the cultural institutions in the park must be incorporated into event plans rather than burdened with negative impacts resulting from the event. During previous US Open tournaments, for instance, some institutions in the park had to shut down their operations because of strict security measures throughout the park. Similarly, museums in Exposition Park have had to close to accommodate special events, including during the opening of the 2015 Special Olympics World Summer Games at Memorial Coliseum. Park institutions should be seen as key stakeholders during commercial events. Their presence should be leveraged as opportunities to enhance the visitor experience, and integrated into the marketing plan and admissions structure. Should a facility need to close because of a commercial event, it should be compensated appropriately.
There is no question that commercial events—be they mega-events or urban festivals—have a range of implications for public spaces. They can have a positive role in the activation and life of cities, but turning public spaces into venues is often controversial. As demonstrated by the two New York World’s Fairs, events can both denigrate and animate city space. Further, they are complicit in the commercialization, privatization and securitization of public space noted by commentators in recent years. At the same time, the organization of special events can be leveraged to preserve, improve, and even create new public spaces. The sites created or enhanced for ephemeral large-scale events have the potential to leave a positive and lasting legacy for the host population. But cities must recognize them to be unique, quasi-private and quasi-public, and thus must be prepared to creatively plan for their management and long-term reuse.
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