

Despite promises by IOC, sustainability of Olympics has been decreasing

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A team of researchers from the University of Lausanne, New York University and the University of Bern has found that despite efforts by the International Olympic Committee, the Olympics have been

decreasing in sustainability since 2012. In their paper published in the journal *Nature Sustainability*, the group describes their study of the sustainability of both the summer and winter Olympic games going back to 1992 and what they found. Jules Boykof, with Pacific University, has published a News & Views piece in the same journal issue outlining the work done by the researchers with this effort.

As Boykof notes, this past January, the IOC announced that it had established new [sustainability](#) goals for the Olympic games, one of which would be for the games to become climate positive by 2024. In this new effort, the researchers looked at the sustainability of past Olympic games to assess the likelihood of the IOC reaching its stated goals.

Sustainability of the Olympic games, as with other human activities, is a measure of the carbon footprint involved in hosting all of its events. Each Olympic event is hosted by a chosen country, and each involves a host of activities that can lead to [carbon emissions](#)—using gas powered equipment to erect venues, for example, or making use of public transportation versus private vehicle travel.

To measure the sustainability of a given Olympics, the researchers created a sustainability index by dividing Olympic activities into three main categories: ecological, social and economic. Each of the categories was then further broken down into sub-categories. They then assigned points to each sub-category. The researchers then measured the sustainability of both the summer and winter Olympic games using their index and compared each of the games with all the others. The result was a ranking system for all of the Olympic games held since 1992.

The researchers found that some events scored much higher than others, and that some scored very low. And sadly, they found that the rankings have been sinking since 2002. They suggest three main ways to improve

the sustainability of the games: have rotating cities to allow reuse of facilities, limit attendance at the games and set up a system of enforcement of sustainability standards.

More information: An evaluation of the sustainability of the Olympic Games, *Nature Sustainability* (2021). 10.1038/s41893-021-00696-5 , www.nature.com/articles/s41893-021-00696-5

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